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The Magic Box: The Future of Television in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This thesis explores the recent shift to digital television in order to gauge the full importance of the development. It will examine the range of central issues associated with the technology and explain its significance on a number of levels. The project begins by outlining why television has become a core social and civic resource before reviewing the angles from which it has been studied. The second chapter details the methods that have defined the project and the steps involved within the research process. The history of the medium is then detailed to show the actors and organisations responsible for its development and the ideological values they have drawn upon. Digitalisation is then outlined so that the technological differences with analogue are made clear. A chapter on theory follows which attempts to place these insights into a framework so that the shift and its overall importance can be understood. Government policy is next considered as the thesis highlights the political plans that have been devised for digital television and the objectives set out for it. A content study then attempts to compare the programming patterns of the current television system with those of the pre-multichannel era. This chapter aims to point out any significant differences within the content profiles of the two systems. The thesis concludes by drawing all of this together to show the consequences of a shift to digital broadcasting and the ideas that have directed this change.

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Chapter 1: Introduction – A Means of Communication

Television is not merely a means of broadcasting; nor is it merely a means of presenting entertainment. It is the newest means of communication invented by man (Memorandum by the British Film and Cinema Industries, 1952, quoted in Briggs, 1979:13).

As an industry, social instrument, cultural resource and political tool television has made immense contributions to various strands of life. These have been achieved through its technological form, domestic centrality and popularity as a household good. As a means of communication it has connected people with each other and to the events of the world by delivering programming straight into people's homes. Corner and Harvey (1996:IX) claim that it has become a landmark because it has become so deeply embedded within daily life in a short period of time. Over the last eighty years it has quickly grown from obscure and uncertain beginnings into an international phenomenon with implications in a number of spheres so that social, political, economic and cultural issues have not only been affected by the medium, but have at times been defined by it.

Yet television has acquired an 'ordinariness' from which it has come to be an accepted part of life such is its absorption into daily habits. This is illustrated by the fact that in the late 1990's an estimated 99.4% of the UK population has regular access to its programming (Wedell and Luckham, 2001:4). Moreover, the average time spent watching it in the UK is three hours per day (McQueen, 1998:3). For these reasons, Newby (1997:1) feels we cannot escape television because its power creates events which affect us all. The sheer ubiquity of the medium has meant that fundamental questions over its potency have inevitably arisen along with anxieties and hopes over what it achieves. Brunsdon (1997:96) points out that it has historically attracted distrust, fear and contempt. At the same time though there has been

optimism that it can be used for positive ends. Newcomb (2000:7) asserts that these questions remain in a constant state of reconsideration and are woven in with new issues and problems. Together, these matters form a constant backdrop against which television has been judged.

The current period is an extremely unsettling moment for television as it undergoes change on a number of levels. Wedell and Luckham (2001:8) argue television is currently at the crossroads with several changes simultaneously occurring that are in the process of transforming the medium. They go on to state that the explosion in the number of channels, the expansion of broadcasting beyond national frontiers as well as the arrival of digital transmission have moved the goalposts upon which broadcasting was based (*ibid.*). Identifying the forces that have driven this and the consequences of such a shift forms the purpose of this project to understand the exact nature of change.

Digital television was launched in Britain in the autumn of 1998 amidst a flurry of governmental and industrial discourses that it represents the future of the medium. Dahlgren (2000a:4) concurs, asserting that the future of television is digital as this has been set in scope by those who mould the shape of the medium. How this has happened, the factors which have influenced the decisions and the consequences of these measures needs to be fully probed. Steemers (1998a:1) points out that digital technology brings a new complexity to broadcasting. It is already clear that a new broadcasting system is emerging within which the industry is rapidly shifting to give rise to more players who are offering distinct television and information services. Existing broadcasters are also re-evaluating their approach in order to gain a foothold in the digital future, and Government policy is being adjusted to facilitate the conditions of a new broadcasting environment centred around digital technology.

It has to be stressed that television has changed before and this innovation needs to be seen in that light. Indeed, Allen (1998:61) observes that a linear analysis suggests digital is merely another development in the history of the medium. However, the current shifts are happening at the same time as a number of other changes within the communications sector generally, as several commentators believe society is on the cusp of a major shift where it heads into the 'information age'. In this

case, the proliferation in information is thought to bring about new types of services and methods of connection to people that together have implications in a wide number of areas. The spheres of work and home are thought to be transformed because of digital technology so that the ways individuals conduct their lives is increasingly defined by communications technologies.

Holland (2000:4) points out that while television is changing on a number of levels, a series of questions concerning the future development of the medium are bound to be raised. This is the rationale and intention of the project: to identify the key issues associated with the technological change of digitalisation and to clarify what this engenders for television. Dahlgren (2000a:3) insists it is vitally important to uncover the factors which shape the television services we receive. Thus, the project proceeds by exploring the direction in which television is heading by capturing the extent of change before attempting to make sense of it, and using empirical tools to quantify the content patterns that have emerged in the new circumstances. This work is confined to the British context although the difficulty in retaining an entirely national focus should become clear through the course of the study.

The main question to answer, therefore, is what is the future of television in the information age? Holland (2000:233) states that digital technology brings revolutionary changes that affect all aspects of the medium. My aim is to locate these and explain their full significance in terms of media theory. Some commentators have already offered some ideas on what the future of the medium might be. Allen (1998:63) feels that digital television should be viewed primarily as an extension of its analogue counterpart in that it builds upon the basic services to offer a little more. Negroponte (1995:48), on the other hand, sees it as a completely distinct model in which many of the old certainties are being swept away to usher in a totally unique communications device that will perform new duties because of the functions added to it. Uncovering which of these ideas is correct should be clear by the conclusion because it will show what digitalisation entails. However, this is not a technical study given that the technology is only one aspect of change and its significance goes beyond the functions it adds. A full understanding requires attention be paid to the policy measures responsible for its development so that a framework is in place with which to detail the shifts and their institutional character. From here it should be

possible to explain why these changes are going on and their likely impact by asking important questions that are governing the future direction of the medium.

Corner (1999:121) asserts that there is a difficulty in studying television because of the shifting nature of the medium. It is precisely the shifting character that this project targets by exposing the dynamics behind the technological change. The aim is to follow up *Changing Channels: The Prospects for Television in A Digital World*, edited by Jeanette Steemers. This book raises a number of central issues by exploring the potential impact of technological and structural change upon the field of broadcasting. It highlights what is happening in television by initiating investigation and debate on the future of the medium and its position within a broader communications context (Steemers, 1998a:3). The task of this project is to follow that logic in outlining a framework from which to judge the developments and identify signposts that can guide further research.

The remainder of this chapter investigates what television is by surveying research material on the topic that examines its importance to social life. Much of this work pays attention to the unique technological method through which it has acquired its cultural position, explaining how the form of broadcasting and its organisational set-up have enabled it to inform. The chapter considers a number of approaches within which the study of television has taken place and the points of focus each have. These angles illustrate how television has been investigated and the questions that have been asked of it, revealing a range of concerns about the medium along with hopes of what it can achieve. By discussing these, the perspective which is most useful for investigating digitalisation will be made apparent. It concludes by mapping out exactly how the thesis will proceed by detailing the areas of inquiry that constitute this project, how they will be addressed and the approach which makes possible their full examination.

Defining Television

In order to comprehend the significance of current innovations, it is important to have some idea of what television is so as to work out how the medium may change. Burton (2000:X) points out that there have been redefinitions of what television entails because of technological and other changes whereby its meaning has profoundly altered over time. This is compounded by the realisation that the word 'television' stands for so many things in so many contexts for so many different people (Miller, 2003:2). However, much of the work written about television does not define it, instead assuming its ubiquity renders such definitions as unnecessary. I feel that it is critical to establish what the medium is before proceeding, as this too may need reworking in time.

A related problem is trying to capture the full essence of the medium. As Hartley (1999:204) points out "television is like breathing, it's easy to do, but like breathing the mechanics of what is actually going on are not necessarily made visible via the usual resources of ordinary language". Many projects stress how the medium is a series of technical operations from which the transmission of programming, and thus the conveyance of information, takes place. Van Dijk and de Vos (2001:445) explain how these accounts focus on the technical aspects of the medium and offer scientific outlines of how the medium operates. However, I am seeking a fuller definition from where it should be possible to theorise the full extent of these developments and such an angle lies largely outside the scientific domain, despite the need to examine the technological features in some sense.

Newcomb (2000:8) advances that it is the unique elements of television that demand critical attention. These are what distinguish it from other media and have aroused immense concern over its role as a means of communication. It is also through these reference points that changes to the medium can be subsequently gauged. For van Dijk and de Vos (2001:445-446), television is:

1. A public medium.
2. Viewing programmes at a distance.
3. Producing audio-visual programmes and services.

4. For a relatively large audience.

This highlights how firstly, access to the medium is not restricted in that following the initial cost of the hardware, all audience members are able to view the programming, stressing the mass nature of television. Koboldt et al (1999:55) clarify how broadcasting is what economists call a 'public good' as it can be consumed by more than one person at a time, without reducing the amount available to anyone else. This enables it to be consumed on a mass scale. Its status as a public medium also reveals something about its purpose, an idea taken up by Scannell. He outlines how a "whole clutch of political and social issues came onto the agenda through the medium of television [and thus] became part of the public domain, matters of common knowledge and concern" (1990:25). So, it performs a public function by bringing out social issues into the open. On these grounds, Corner and Harvey (1996:X) feel television is an effective system for communicating with millions of people.

The second area of van Dijk and de Vos's (2001:445) definition emphasises the manner in which television output transcends space. It also highlights how programming is transmitted from sender to receiver, typified by a one way flow of information whereby there are limited opportunities for viewers to respond or shape the programming they receive. The third point stresses the type of output television relays and the fact that these are the result of professional routines. Newby (1997:7) takes this up when emphasising how certain rules governing programming in terms of length, genre, timing and so on have evolved over time and it is these which mark out television as we know it.

Lastly, television programming is meant for more than just a single individual because its form is one of the delivery of a message from a single point to many receivers. Indeed, the very origins of the word 'broadcasting' are located in agriculture as the term for the scattering of seeds over as wide an area as possible (MacCabe, 1986:107). This feature also highlights how the practise of television has a concern for large audiences that is rooted in the technological form within which it has been structured. Overall, van Dijk and de Vos (2001:446) feel that this definition distinguishes television from other media because it stresses the salient features of the medium along with the unique functions these enable.

Corner (1999:4) asserts there are three aspects of television which continually figure in debates and cement its public nature. These are its *electronic, visual* and *mass/domestic* qualities, which combine to differentiate it from other media. The electronic nature of television gives it an apparent 'liveness' and immediacy that other media lack (Corner, 1995:12). Furthermore, its ability to provide visual information provides viewers with an expanded sensory and informational field (ibid.13). Finally, the small number of outlets distributing material to a large number of individuals, combined with the typical reception in the privacy of the home, are unique as compared to other media (ibid.15).

Collectively, these factors give "the communicative profile of television a reach, potential instantaneity, scopic range and penetration of everyday living which transcend other media...and lie at the heart of so many arguments about television's power" (Corner, 1999:4). Barwise and Ehrenberg (1988:8) take a broadly similar view as they find three special features to television. They feel that the distinctiveness of the medium lies in the way in which the set is situated in the home, how nearly everyone watches it and that its moving pictures can be so vivid. They also add that television is *passive* in that it requires lower levels of involvement than other media given that watching it demands little physical, emotional, intellectual or financial effort¹. Finally, it is an activity that is done we have nothing better or more important to do (ibid. 124).

Together these working definitions combine as a useful starting point because they focus our understanding of the medium on to the discrete areas which create a specific means of communication and reveal the features it does not share with other media. They stress the technology but also highlight how this adds to its social status by explaining the functions it provides. This is achieved by breaking up the medium into separate elements that comprise its process of message form and transmission right through to reception. In doing so, these points provide a focus for the study of television and a yardstick against which subsequent changes to the medium can be

¹ This point is not without contention as several Cultural Studies theorists continually stress the 'active audience' and process of meaning making while viewing.

gauged by making it possible to see what happens when a factor impacts upon these core elements.

An important issue to consider is the extent to which these characteristics are challenged by digital technology, whereby the whole essence of the medium is overhauled and these features no longer describe what we understand to be television. Holland (2000:225) argues that new technologies are changing the basic ideas of what television is and the functions it offers because the borders of the medium are being redefined. As well as documenting this process of redefinition, one further task for this project is to investigate whether in fact there is a robust definition of television possible given the nature of the technological changes going on². That is, the shifts may be so deep and fundamental that they challenge the very notion of television as is currently understood, and consequently signal an entirely new beginning for the communications device that it becomes. For instance, the technology has the potential to steer television into different directions so that it will no longer be a public or even a mass medium given that content could be provided on an individual basis.

The Importance of Television

The defining features of television have given it a social centrality, and in turn, a number of purposes that have been assigned to it to further objectives that are thought to be within its ability. Television has thus become important for the manner in which it supplies information to mass audiences and the possibilities this function generates. Gripsrud (2002:260-262) outlines a number of reasons for television's status as the most important communications tool in today's society. He explains how it has an enormous reach and is also the medium people spend the most time with. As a result, it is centrally located within society in that it has assumed a national importance from which it is closely linked to other centres of power. Television also dominates the agenda of social discussion in that it is the main arena in which the affairs of society are conducted. Lastly, television is an important vehicle for culture as the diverse nature of its output proves and this determines the universally shared menu of national life (ibid.).

² I am indebted to Professor Ian Hargreaves for this idea.

Moreover, Kellner (1990:2) points out that people rely on television for information more than any other media because it has earned itself an unrivalled level of trust. For these reasons, its reach to virtually all sections of society, along with the delivery straight into people's homes, the range of genres and the realism of the visual imagery it relays has encouraged the belief amongst Government, academic and industrial commentators that it can serve civic needs. These duties are tempered however by a series of concerns which focus on the number of social problems the medium is thought to induce and/or exacerbate. Corner and Harvey (1996:XI) ask a number of questions which illuminate the series of issues that have continually figured in discussions: is television a servant of public interest or corporate profit? Is it an agent of enlightenment or trivialising distraction? Is it a creature of the powerful or an enabler of democracy?

While democracy has been thought to be something television can further, there has also been a sense of danger that it might provoke behaviour antithetical to such objectives. The biggest anxiety has been that of effect with the medium accused of variously causing violent, immoral or anti-social behaviour because of its assumed power (Barwise and Ehrenberg, 1988:138). Another strand of criticism is equally accusatory towards the low cultural norms and process of 'dumbing down' it ascribes to television, along with the detrimental effect the medium is thought to have on literacy and learning (Briggs and Burke, 2002:253). These fears have featured prominently in terms of public debate and governmental inquiry with the underlying feeling that its output requires strict regulation because of the negative influence the medium is thought to pose. Burton (2000:220) explains how there is no doubt we believe effects and influence exist, the problem is in proving it. Nevertheless, this is a persistent theme in attitudes towards the medium and retains a high placement on the public agenda. Thus, it is possible to detect a division within the literature between what commentators think television can do and how they feel it actually does perform in relation to these ideas.

It is perhaps much easier to clarify the positive contributions television can make and several theorists address this by observing how it has changed the flow of information in society. Corner (1999:118) advances that television has rapidly altered

the scale, speed of circulation and nature of knowledge in society. This has occurred because it conveys a wide variety of programme types on a daily basis, and it is this which increases the array of cultural experiences available to viewers. One by-product of this is described by Sacks:

At the heart of any culture is the process by which we induct successive generations into a narrative, the story of which we are a part...storytelling is the locus of identity, the vehicle of continuity...Today, that it is what television does for us and our children. We no longer gather round the fire; instead we cluster around the screen...It has become the single most powerful arena of narrative, our repertoire of textuality (Sacks, 2001:143).

Television has become the arena through which culture is filtered as its output provides the information people rely upon. Entertainment has formed the majority of the medium's content and Corner (1999:93) claims the giving of pleasure is a primary function of most television production. This does not detract from its importance as the fact that television can please viewers within their own homes reveals its achievements and power. Hargreaves (2001:27) argues broadcasting tells stories that bind, creating communities that cut across restrictive local confines. This story telling supplies what Graham (1999:35) calls 'common knowledge' and helps foster a sense of community. Graham's point is that television allows co-ordination between members of a society because it generates a shared stock of information everyone can draw from to see themselves in relation to the community of which they are a part. In doing so, television shapes the way millions of people interact with the rest of society (Puttnam, 2001:109).

It is these new forms of interaction and the provision of shared reference points that display the medium's special qualities. That is, it has enabled people to engage with each other and events across time and distance. The social consequences of this have been profound:

By placing political, religious, civic, cultural events and entertainments in a common domain, public life was equalised in a way that had never before been possible. Moreover, whereas previously while such events had been quite discrete and separate, they took on new meanings as they came into contact with each other (Scannell, 1992:322).

The public nature of television is clearly demonstrated here because it reveals the relationship the technology has had with society. One strand of research considers the mode of reception by outlining the manner in which it has been absorbed into domestic routines and the conditions of use. This angle of inquiry describes the extent to which television has reordered the space of the home (Corner, 1999:88). Another area that has been studied concerns social impact, where the focus is on how individuals are connected to the world via television. By concentrating on the second area the importance of television becomes clear.

Despite its private mode of reception, television is very much a public medium because it has advanced civic impulses by giving access to information and pleasures that were previously restricted (Scannell, 1990:16). Moreover, it has enlarged citizens understanding of the world and their own place within it by helping to represent and define social reality. For Ellis (2002:9), television has initiated the process of 'witness' as the volume of information it relays has led to a profound shift in the way individuals perceive that which exists beyond their own experiences. Therefore, a new type of experience has been established through television to encompass co-presence with events by conferring an intimacy and liveness for the audience (ibid. 33). Television has simultaneously connected individuals with each other and the world to become a point of contact for audiences from which they are able to sample pleasures, experiences and knowledge in the manner of a shared national vernacular.

Moreover, it has fostered new types of identity because of its ability to bring events and people together. Corner (1999:5) claims television has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It is centripetal in that it pulls in and processes a diverse variety of cultural features, and centrifugal, in that its reach impacts to the widest boundaries of the culture. This repeated action of ingestion and projection provide television with extraordinary cultural dynamics (ibid.). That is, it takes direction from cultural patterns of the time as defining social features are weaved into programming, yet its centralised node within everyday routines enables it to shape cultural patterns in some way. Ellis (2002:58) labels this double-edged process as 'influences given and influences received'. It is clear that television's positioning within society means that it is both reflective of and a contributor to culture. Smith (1998:1) takes up this point and advances that it "offers a continuous flowing experience from which we

have come to draw much of the substance of our identities". So, we are able to understand who we are and our wider social roles through television.

Ellis (2002:44) observes another method in which the medium has achieved this. He argues television's schedules gradually reflected the rhythms of day and year to become central in articulating a sense of the national. So, by showing events of social importance a whole calendar emerged that projected a sense of Britishness which all could partake in. MacCabe (1986:109) takes up this idea when explaining television programming has helped to constitute different strands of identity for audience members, ranging from the national to the local and including class, race and gender forms of collectivity.

For all of these reasons television has aroused a lasting identification with democracy amongst certain commentators, something which acts as a counterweight to the blame it has received for causing social problems. Dahlgren (1995:2) points out that the concern for democracy automatically necessitates a concern about television. The medium's functions, centrality and the manner in which it has become so deeply involved with daily affairs, demands that civic concerns are addressed when thinking about the medium. Hargreaves (2001:25) meanwhile, explains why broadcasting technology is democratic in that following the establishment of the infrastructure, the marginal cost of distribution falls towards zero, allowing more people to receive it at no extra expense and also because it does not require even audience literacy. Hartley (1999:159) expands on this point by arguing that television has become implicated in civic issues in new and complicated ways. That is not to say it guarantees democracy, just that it is bound up with it. Indeed, Smith (1998:1) stresses that television has had a transforming influence whereby political life has been thoroughly altered.

Furthermore, a strand of criticism laments the negative impact the medium has had on the way politics is now conducted, while another lauds it for making such matters more accessible. Corner (1995:52) takes up the theme by clarifying how the manner in which mediation occurs affects the nature of democratic activity. He argues that this is achieved by the method in which the conditions of public knowledge and participation can be altered. So, the types of issues television deals with and the treatment they receive is important because of the manner in which they may frame

public understanding. Smith (1986:1) explains that because of this, broadcasters find themselves taking pre-emptive and far-reaching judgements about a vast range of issues. They have thus assumed positions of extreme importance because their decisions have clear implications for citizenry.

Le Grand and New (1999:114-120) argue democracy revolves around four principles that broadcasting can contribute to. It can promote *community* because it allows large numbers of people to share in the consumption of a single product at the same time. Over the course of its history television has demonstrated an ability to act as a forum for social concerns as well as a location in which the interests of marginalised groups are aired to a wider audience. *Opportunity* is also a key imperative in that broadcasting can provide the knowledge with which people can make informed decisions about the central issues in their lives. It does so by showing what is going on in the world, opening up new possibilities that individuals can contemplate. Thirdly, *responsibility* stresses how broadcasters need to be careful not to incite immoral behaviour through the nature of the material transmitted. Instead, broadcasters have to commit themselves to the social good by relaying programming that promotes issues such as health awareness, assist charity causes and help to serve the law by catching criminals and so forth.

Lastly, *accountability* is a crucial purpose as democracy can only be served if there is an effective source of criticism. Scrutinising Government activity through news programmes, investigative journalism, interviews and discussion is therefore a principal aim. The authors add that broadcasters themselves must demonstrate accountability and probity so that they can carry out these duties in the public interest. These points embody civic overtones in various ways because they place public concerns above all others. The authors point out that these aims have to be achieved rather than expected as television must be directed towards them (ibid. 122). However, it is only through detailed regulation and public policy that these objectives can be fully achieved as the technology must be guided towards these ends.

The reasons outlined have encouraged many theorists to claim that television has become the prime institution of the public sphere in modern societies (Scannell, 1992:333; Hoynes, 1994:163; Corner, 1995:42; Dahlgren, 1995:23; Hutchinson,

1999:82; Gripsrud, 1999:1; Gripsrud, 2002:271). The basic function of the public sphere is to facilitate the type of information flow that serves citizenry³. Television's democratic worth lies in its ability to do things other media cannot, coupled with its acceptance into everyday life and centrality within the home. Sacks (2001:145) insists television acts as an arena of shared public conversation on who we are. Through this, Gripsrud (1999:2) claims "television is a principle stock exchange of public discourse, supplying the widely shared pool of information and perspectives from which people create their understandings of the self, the world and citizenship". It is able to do this because television journalism fosters forms of awareness and public knowledge conducive to the democratic character of society (Dahlgren, 1995:47).

So, the democratic thrust of television lies in its programming, the nature of which will determine the extent to which the medium serves audiences. In this way, television is about connecting the entire population with the public sphere and improving people's ability to form their own opinions (Gripsrud, 2002:271). On these grounds, Smith (1986:21) claims that the BBC, and broadcasting generally, have been the greatest instruments of social democracy during the twentieth century, more important even than the health service, National Insurance and State education system combined. The primary task for those who govern the medium has been to ensure the medium is committed to objectives that enable it to carry out democratic duties.

For this reason, regulation has been used to direct the content of television towards the purposes described above and to other aims which seek to safeguard the public interest. Franklin (2001:129) outlines how regulation has been formulated to guarantee the compliance of taste and decency, augmented by securing impartiality and fairness in political programming and the sensitive portrayal of individuals and issues. Such themes have become benchmarks against which programming is assessed as they are the central features of regulation. At the same time, the need to control the imputed effects has resulted in controls that seek to eradicate the types of gratuitous output that are thought to cause social problems (Svennevig, 1998:83).

³ The themes of public sphere and public service broadcasting are taken up fully in Chapter Five.

The key concept informing legislation used to advance democratic goals has been public service broadcasting, a set of measures designed to mould the technology into a shape that serves democracy. This philosophy has occupied a central role in British broadcasting, ensuring that civic goals have been weaved into the regulation. Thus, impartiality, diversity, the public interest and the delivery of a range and quality of programme types are the canons by which broadcasting output have been continually judged (Feintuck, 1999:37). The objectives of democracy have therefore determined the framework of television and the output it conveys.

Many of these academics broadly agree on the manner in which they feel television has socially contributed because they express similar views. Yet democracy is an objective television has to be directed towards to ensure programming provides the sort of information that allows people to make informed decisions. An area of serious contention focuses on television's organisational set-up, which some commentators claim inhibits it from fulfilling its democratic potential (Murdock, 2000b:54). There has been a long-running debate that television has been 'dumbing down' where broadcasters have moved towards triviality at the expense of informative programming. Such a view stresses that while television has a public character, the structure within which it operates needs to be reworked to guide it towards democratic principles.

Another area in which television's importance has grown is as a major sector of the economy, whereby financial concerns have gradually moved to centre stage. Franklin (2001:129) explains that the medium has grown massively as an industry and is now a significant source of employment and substantial contributor to the nation's GDP. It is situated within an international system of trading where programming, personnel and institutions frequently crossover into other countries as business logic determines the operations of the industry. Thus, Smith (1998:1) argues the consumer economy has come to increasingly depend on television. Given that its economic remit has spread over time, certain commentators feel that these duties should now take priority in order to establish a vibrant industry that advances the material interests of the nation. The extent to which this objective is in tension with the civic duties outlined previously is a theme taken up at various points in this project. Overall, the section has shown the variety of ways in which television is important

and the different levels at which this operates. While there is considerable debate over certain issues, such as the question of broadcasting influence, there can be little doubt that it has contributed to the manner in which individuals engage with the world. These factors have encouraged those who develop the medium to construct a careful set of purposes that reveal a perception of what television can achieve in both positive and negative terms.

Studying Television

Holland (2000:8) stresses that the study of television has attracted suspicion and amused condescension from some commentators who berate its value as a worthwhile subject area. However, McQueen (1998:5) explains why it demands to be studied by arguing that because it has become so omnipresent and consequential to modern society attention has to be devoted to it. The variety of ways in which people have understood the importance of television have influenced the ways in which it has been studied. Through this, critical approaches to television are shaped by perceptions of the medium and are particular to it (Burton, 2000:13). The feeling has been that television has carved out certain roles because it operates according to a logic not found in other media and it is the duty of academics to identify this. The issues of the last section have thus framed the study of television by posing a number of questions that have motivated scholars in their approach towards the medium.

The concerns that television has raised and the manner in which these have been formulated have directed researchers towards observing certain aspects of the medium in pursuit of the answers. There have been many areas of inquiry, ranging from the effects question, issues of representation, its role in the maintenance of class relations, the social experience of viewing and so on. The significance of a variety of approaches is described below:

We can look at it from these different angles, each of which refracts our understanding of it in slightly different ways. I find the familiar figure of the prism useful here because not only does it suggest television is many-sided and each side refracts our understanding in a particular way, but also because it implies the difficulties of seeing all the sides at the same time. As we turn

our attention to one side of the prism, the others vanish from our view (Dahlgren, 1995:25).

Projects on television focus on distinct parts of the medium so that it has been studied at different points and in a multitude of ways. However, the focus on what is deemed to be the crucial aspect of the medium by an academic tradition comes at the expense of other areas (Corner and Harvey, 1996:XV). That is, research only partially reveals something about the medium owing to the limitations of focusing on a single segment to address a particular problem. The reason for this splintered approach is explained by Brunson (1997:95), who points out that early academic study on television was carried out in other fields as there was no such thing as a 'Television Studies'.

The origins of the research are apparent in the questions around which projects have been conducted, with the consequence that disciplines as varied as Sociology, Psychology, Literary Studies, History and Political Science amongst many others have investigated the medium. Each has brought the tools and assumptions from its own body of work so that television fits into their field's intellectual canon. The consequences of this are outlined by John Hartley:

The object of study is colossal, chaotic, complex...There's no unity in the *study*, any more than there is in *television*, since analysts speak different disciplinary languages, use different methods, in pursuit of different questions about different bits of the overall phenomenon (Hartley, 1999:17; italics in original).

There has at times been an incoherence rather than an eclecticism in television research as it has been housed in various disciplines that regard it in a sense that is specific to their own subject-area. This steers subsequent work into identical directions because it continues to focus on the same elements of the medium and issues that were previously addressed. Thus, psychologists continue to grapple with the notion of effects, sociologists focus on representation while textualists think about narrative theory and so on.

Newcomb (2000:1) points out that the academic problem has been the development of vocabularies sufficient to consider all these matters. The fragmented manner in which television has been studied has meant researchers have asked

different questions and used opposing methods, drawing upon separate academic frameworks. Bignell (2004:2) explains how “approaches to Television Studies are not a set of tools, but more like a group of different languages. They do not translate neatly into one another, and each defines its world in rather different ways”. Disciplinary divisions are therefore observable in the literature about television to maintain a pedagogical separation as projects focus on one part of the medium which they analyse from a single angle. It is the disparate nature of study that reveals how television is a contested object subject to massive dispute (Brunsdon, 1997:95).

It is not the task of this thesis to survey all the various approaches to television and their academic origins as that has been detailed elsewhere⁴. Rather, the task is to locate and justify the angle that will serve the purpose of this project fully through virtue of it offering the tools and concepts with which to explore the changes associated with digital technology. Therefore, the need is to select the academic area that reveals the substance of digitalisation, the subsequent measures initiated in the policy arena and which clarifies the patterns in output. Of all the alternatives it is clear that the institutional approach would make possible the aims of this project. These inquiries look at the broadcasting environment and regulatory regime to detect how it is structured, the forms of finance and programming policies. Corner (1997:255) clarifies how theories of institution are primarily concerned with the organisational structure of television. This means linking factors such as funding, production, distribution and regulation with the activities of the State as well as with market structures. These studies concentrate on questions of broadcasting policy, technological change, finance and other related factors.

Policy research is also included in this approach and considers the same sorts of issues by focusing on organisation, financing, legal frameworks, ownership control, procedures for licensing, rules for access and the freedoms and constraints on communication (Dahlgren, 1995:12). The thrust of institutional theory is that the shape of television is a result of structural choices manifest in the technological form of the medium, its output and the conditions of availability. So, these factors have been investigated because they determine the type of television service audiences

⁴ Miller (2003:6) lists the major approaches to studying television and their disciplinary origins.

receive, its cost and the general aims to which it is committed. MacDonald (1993:185) points out that institutional analysis includes teasing out the connections between technology, the State and consumers along with observing the operations of media organisations, the legal system and commercial forces. It will become clear that these are the issues which surround the development of digital television.

My focus is on the distinct technological aspects of change, the policy approach towards it and the ensuing programming patterns to capture what digital television is, the political plans for it and what it provides in terms of output. By doing this, I intend to explain its significance for media theory. However, I am unable to address industrial issues in as much depth as they deserve, owing to limitations of space and time, but I am aware that this issue is extremely important for a project of this kind. Indeed, Smith (1998:1) asserts that television is undergoing a technological and institutional shift at the current moment. Change is occurring with the technologies television utilises, within the regulatory regime and in the organisations that are responsible for the medium. The institutional approach seeks to identify these actors, their motivations, plans and the context within which the media operates as well as detailing whether such ideas work out in the style that was envisaged.

Franklin (2001:15) asserts that there have been a series of ‘perennial questions’ asked of the medium right through its entire history. These include clarifying its mission, and disentangling the factors such as finance, regulation and programming that enable it to do the prescribed purposes set out for it. These are the pillars around which institutional research has been conducted because they reveal the nature of the broadcasting system. Focusing these themes onto the next stage in the medium’s evolution therefore represents continuity in regards to one of the ways in which television has been addressed, studied and evaluated. Indeed, Bignell (2004:32) clarifies that issues of how television is delivered, watched, financed and organised are matters of major concern, given the medium’s centrality towards understanding culture and society. As digitalisation potentially changes these elements, the need for sustained study around these matters is more necessary.

The next matter revolves around how to assess these changes as there must be some sort of criteria against which they can be judged. Given television’s importance

and its contributions to civic life, the most obvious route would be to think about digital television in relation to the same principles that it has been held to during its life span. Corner (1995:33) takes this up by arguing the basic question ‘television and democracy – constraint or tool?’ is important to keep in mind in different contexts. It provides a benchmark against which the structure and performance of the medium can be assessed. Hoynes (1994:165) similarly feels that research should be motivated by the need to identify the principles of a democratic system, locating those factors that are likely to further it and clarifying the obstacles that work against such objectives.

The task here is to identify the factors which inhibit television’s potential to fulfil these ends by identifying what it can achieve and advancing why it may fall short. Kellner (1990:4) follows this line of thinking by detailing how theory and research should direct television to function in the service of democratic goals. The point is to have a television system that safeguards civic rights because of the institutional structure that it is situated within, guaranteeing the range and quality of programming necessary for civic engagement. Thus, it is through the objective of a democratic broadcasting system that research should evaluate digital television, a focus that repeatedly stresses the linkage between output and structure. On this subject, Miller (2003:19) feels research on television is needed to counter the debates framed by economists, business journalists and corporate lobbyists. Miller’s point is that discussions about television have often been governed by the interests of various groups rather than the public. Academic inquiries can avoid this by using the principle of democracy to underpin research.

Thesis Plan

This project seeks to explore digital television by examining what exactly it is, the political direction to which it is being steered and the patterns in programming that are emerging. Although this study is concerned with the future shape of television, its aim is not to predict but to understand current trends in order to see the path of its development. Negrine (1998b:85) argues that to inquire into the future and explore the likely fate, research has to determine the nature of the past and the present. Understanding this will provide considerable insight from which it is possible to peer

into the future by highlighting the defining features of the evolving medium. This study aims to comprehend the development of television from the angle of an ongoing technological and regulatory change in order to grasp the nature and implications of a new profile for the medium. It can only be a snapshot of what is a constantly changing field in much the same way as Jensen and Toscan's (1999:14) volume on a broadly similar topic. Their work offers another model of how to engage with change by discussing the current technological shifts in television. The objective of democracy underpins many inquiries into the medium and so the significance of digital technology will be considered in this light.

Chapter Two concerns methodology and outlines the tools and techniques used within the research process. **Chapter Three** provides an historical overview of television to highlight how the medium has developed up until its digital stage, and the actors and organisations that have been responsible for it at different times. **Chapter Four** focuses on the technology of digital television and the institutions that are involved in its implementation. It outlines how digitalisation changes analogue television and the range of possible implications it holds. **Chapter Five** provides a theoretical framework from which the significance of digital television can be understood. It offers six viewpoints, each of which projects different ideas on what the medium can and should do, and how this development can be understood. **Chapter Six** points out the Government's policies for digital television by highlighting the plans that they have and how these cohere with wider aims for the communications sector. **Chapter Seven** offers a content study of programming by examining the patterns in output at different times to gauge the type of content which digital television brings to audiences. **Chapter Eight** acts as a conclusion by bringing all of the above together in order to answer the question: what shape has television assumed in its early digital incarnation?

Chapter 2: Methodology - Capturing Change

This chapter aims to document the actual research process involved in the project by outlining the framework of operation, the ideas and intentions of the study, together with the tools with which to do the research. It will do this by demarcating the topic into manageable parts through focusing on salient issues, marking out the guidelines of the study by emphasising the areas of television that need to be probed and how the theme of change is to be operationalised. Clough and Nutbrown (2002:27) stress how methods arise in the service of particular needs and purposes. So, it is the demands of the study that will call for certain tools and angles of inquiry to fulfil the remit of the project.

Chapter One established the grounds for drawing on the tools and approaches of institutional theories because of their historically proven ability to disentangle the complexities of this subject area. The issues at the core of this project have been dealt with by these perspectives previously (see for instance Collins, 2002a; Goodwin, 1998; McQuail, 1998) and so a model exists of how to tackle such a topic. This analysis determines the manner in which the research is conducted, because the priorities of theory skew the nature of the research by detailing what parts of the phenomena to look at and how. Such a decision defines the research territory, indicates the literature to be consulted and the methods to be used (Blaxter et al, 1996:36). My approach towards studying television regards the medium as comprised of a distinct technological architecture and political character that together determine its output patterns. Institutional theories examine television at these points because the aim is to detail structural shifts that are manifest in these constituent areas of the medium. Thus, whilst it is clear that methods are a means to an end (Hansen et al, 1998:3), the research objectives they serve are imposed by the demands of the project which have been delineated by the imperatives of theory.

Research Questions

It is essential to have a set of questions derived from the main statement in order to focus the research into concrete directions. Several media scholars emphasise the need to dissect the main statement of the study into smaller, researchable questions (MacDonald, 1993:243; Hornig Priest, 1996:12; Halloran, 1998:16; Wimmer and Dominick, 2003:13). These writers argue that such a technique makes the problem solvable because it raises specific issues to be addressed through generating a clarity of purpose, which subsequently directs research towards salient areas of the phenomena. Formulating questions therefore streamlines the inquiry from the general area of the statement towards particular, manageable themes. Clough and Nutbrown (2000:52) rationalise their importance when describing how they set the parameters of the study by defining the central issues to provide a clear focus. The point is that questions need to be asked that enable research to get close to the object of study, moving the inquiry away from the big picture to narrow it down onto the areas that matter. This is to be achieved by framing concerns in a style that makes it possible to obtain answers whilst also ensuring they connect with the main statement.

The pertinence of simplifying the object of study into testable hypotheses is emphasised by Babbie (1998:87) who claims that posing problems properly is often more difficult than answering them. This raises the key issues of which questions to ask and I set out to probe the reasons for digitalisation's importance. Negrine (1998b:84) argues that projects of this type must be able to demonstrate change in its various forms and account for these shifts. The various forms clearly refer to a technological transformation and so it was vital to grasp the full essence of this. Similarly, MacDonald (1993:XI) observes how broadcasting is currently undergoing change partly due to Government initiatives and partly due to the many technological developments. Digitalisation has therefore been initiated politically by authorities who have designed certain purposes for it. O'Malley (1994:14) makes the same point that technology per se does not change broadcasting but people acting in a particular way with policy. Research must therefore target these two areas to understand the

regulatory framework television is being placed within, the institutions responsible for it and the impact of these factors on the overall broadcasting ecology.

This enabled me to gain my first two areas of focus, namely technology and policy, and these have generally featured as critical concerns that projects of this kind usually address. I subsequently added programming because it is an issue that institutional theories have often considered and is also one dimension in which the effects of structural change should be manifest. I was motivated by the idea that as the end product, the programming of any television system is the unit at which the technology would have had some sort of impact. I therefore felt it provided an effective measure of gauging the notion of change. In other words, comparing the output patterns of two different periods would expose the range of effects that technological and political developments have had on broadcasting services.

The importance of these three discrete, yet interdependent areas means there is a prudent way to conceptualise the significance of the new application. I spent a considerable amount of time in conjunction with my supervisors devising the precise themes that these questions would probe. That is, looking at digital television through the lens of these constituent areas of the medium should allow its significance to be monitored and understood. The main research questions are thus:

1. In what ways and with what effect does digitalisation change the technological architecture of analogue television?
2. Is there an identifiable overall policy approach being adapted for the diffusion of digital television and, if so, what does this entail?
3. What types of programming patterns are emerging in such a multichannel environment as compared to an analogue television system?

This approach should make it possible to work out the application of digital technology towards the medium and whether it is in the process of causing a number of distinct ruptures across the broadcasting terrain. The chief focus of this project is thus to capture the nature of technological and political change before identifying programming patterns in order to grasp fully the overall direction of television, illuminating how it has developed and the aims to which it has been steered. From

here it should be possible to detect if change has worked out in the manner that was envisaged and whether certain factors need attention. This also meets Berger's (2000:16) stipulation that hypotheses must be reasonable and testable because they are clear, specific and attainable.

The linkage between method and theory raises a series of issues that can be woven into the above considerations as thematic strands with which to inform the research process and assist the interpretation of data. As Negrine (1998b:76) observes "without theoretical underpinning, research is not only incomplete but also unconnected to those sorts of issues about social change which are at the heart of social research". While some theoretical assumptions have had to be invoked prior to the formulation of the research plans, it was necessary to draw upon such ideas when conducting the research and also for the interpretation of data. Chapter Five raises a number of concerns over how to understand digital television by offering a conceptual base with which to make sense of the results derived from the main research questions. I considered issues that these theories raised whilst trying to grasp all the implications of my findings because they provided a clear focus for how digital television is progressing. For instance, these positions offered clear ideas on what would happen to the technology, policy and programming aspects of television when it undergoes digitalisation.

The considerations of these six theories thus provided a number of core issues to think about, not all of which I could consider fully, but which nevertheless directed attention onto critical matters. The concerns, derived from the main focus of the study and from literature on the topic, were along the following lines. Is there a place for public service broadcasting in the new circumstances? Does the new technology promote freedom or control? Is the broadcasting environment typified by an array of cottage industries or consolidated TNC's? Has digital television provided distinct forms of public space or reduced it? Is it forging new forms of identity and interaction or are its developments clouded by a general climate of confusion? Is there diversity in programming within the emerging digital television system or a glut of the same sorts of genres? These were the sorts of things to look for as I attempted to answer the three main questions, whereby change could be articulated broadly in relation to technology, policy and programming. Such considerations were intended to make the

interpretation of data clearer by identifying patterns within the broadcasting field and the relationships between variables, actors and institutions. The main questions have therefore been framed to make the theoretical implications much easier to unravel.

Archival Research

The chief means to answer the questions was to examine key documents that dealt with digital television by locating those primary sources that spelt out the plans of the Government. By utilising the original source material on the topic through checking the relevant departments for the plans they had I intended to see how the central issues of the topic were framed and how they would pan out over time. On this matter Deacon et al (1999:22) feel that official collections are essential for archival research because they represent the public expression of those involved in the matter. It is clear that documents establish the basic terms of the issues at stake because they outline how such matters are being formulated and the formal rules in operation. Official Government documents that directly addressed digital television were thus a chief archive for this project. Scott (1990:2) highlights the centrality of archives to research when describing how structures and action are not observable but are instead inferred through documents. They point to what is happening within the area of concern and reveal the principal decision-makers and the formal plans for the object of concern. Negrine (1998b:66) takes up this when outlining how research can be used to explore the evolution of Government approaches to broadcasting in order to contextualise the emergence of ideas, technologies and policies. Thus, the questions that have been repeatedly asked of broadcasting, supported by the identical means of analysis should fully explain why digital television is developing in the way it is.

As Blaxter et al (1996:151) observe “document analysis is necessary for research projects with a policy focus, to examine the materials relevant to a particular set of policy decisions”. In this instance it can reveal where the genesis of this innovation was set by detailing the official measures behind it to convey how the television system is being configured. Following this, document analysis can follow through the consequences of such decisions by looking at how the formal rules are designed to mould the medium in a particular direction. Deacon et al (1999:19) extend

on this up by arguing that documentary sources have to be used to monitor Government decisions, check facts and figures and to track contemporary events.

This topic might be deemed to pose a fundamental methodological quandary in raising whether new media can be studied by the techniques that were formulated for assessing the old media. After all, there could be a degree of concern over whether traditional tools can fully capture the novel forms of interaction and information flow that typify digital media given that such instruments were designed to analyse unilinear forms of communication. However, Hornig Priest (1996:215) argues that it appears less as though new media require new methods because they can be approached in a likewise manner and studied through well-established means. McQuail (2000:484) concurs, stating how despite the challenges they bring, new media can be accommodated within existing academic frameworks because they can be examined in respect of the same issues that surrounded old media and with the same instruments. Over time it may be necessary to formulate new tools to disentangle the nuanced logic of the new media form, but in the meantime traditional instruments will suffice in the pursuit of the research objectives of this project.

Having decided to rely upon documents as one of the main research tools, the next dilemma is raised by Franklin (2001:12), who asks what documents are to be selected for the purposes of the research? With a mass of information on this topic there had to be some rationale behind the selection of material and a certainty that it would describe the reality of the research area. Negrine (1998a:3) hits on this problem too when observing how the choice of document will take the research down a particular path and away from others. So, it will skew the eventual written report because it will highlight certain issues above others, an eventuality that seemingly fails the demands of research to be fully rounded. However, this selectivity cannot be avoided because it would be impossible to survey all the literature on this vast topic.

The difficulty is in gauging how representative any single document is towards the overall statement (Deacon et al, 1999:16), as it is not entirely clear which of the multitude of sources contain the actual strategy. It is more likely that each will provide some indication of the policy as the same themes will thread themselves through different documents, each highlighting how the technology is being

structured. Negrine (1998b:68) follows this up by emphasising the utility of relying on an array of sources, given that each contains different clues to ‘the’ policy in question. Thus, policy is not to be understood via a single set of papers but rather to be unravelled through a series of different types of documents, all of which convey in some form the Government’s stance on digital television. In response to this Franklin (2001:13) offers useful criteria when justifying the choice of documents, ranging from their consequences on broadcasting, the authority of the document and the need to achieve a comprehensive discussion amongst many other factors. These were the considerations I used because they demonstrated the need to collect official sources that dealt centrally with the topic.

I firstly consulted Government documents in order to grasp exactly what digital communications were before scrutinising how important they have been to this administration. Answering question one was fairly straightforward in that I used a combination of primary and secondary sources which ranged in origin to include governmental, industrial and academic to see exactly what digitalisation is, its differences with analogue and its application to television. The website of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport together with that of the Department of Trade and Industry proved to be my main sources as they clearly spelt out what digital television entails and how it works.

Over time, these two departments also formulated a specific web page detailing the Government’s plans for the medium and the motivation behind this embracement. This also spelt out at length the technological issues involved in a digital broadcasting system. Archives are thus essential for firstly establishing how the innovation has come about and then for charting its course once it has been implemented. Indeed, Negrine (1998b:73) argues that in order to understand which factors aid or inhibit development it is necessary to grasp which regulatory, economic and political forces direct the speed and form of diffusion before explaining how these are to be accounted for. It was clear that Government papers and legislation from these departments contained the essential material with which to identify the factors involved in digital television.

It became quickly apparent how highly digital technology has been regarded by the Labour Government, identifiable through the manner in which a specific set of policies has emerged detailing the importance of the media to the party's overall plans. Right through Labour's period of office there has been a recognisable promotion of new communications technologies in general and digital television in particular. At first, this manifested itself in speeches and consultative documents, before becoming legislative. The Government's Green paper in 1998 (DCMS/DTI, 1998), White paper in 2000 (DCMS/DTI, 2000) and 2003 Communications Act (CA, 2003) were therefore my chief focus because they charted the policy process itself and detailed how the ideas and debates were resolved. Such material was of critical importance because it revealed how electronic media were targeted in a precise way in the sense that an actual policy had been formulated for them to carry out certain roles. I therefore regularly checked newspapers and the two ministries responsible for the development of new media where definite objectives were laid out, such as the Digital Action Plan (DAP, 2001), switchover and the creation of OFCOM.

All of this was confirmed with some of the actual documents formulated to express the importance of the new communications technologies. *The Creative Industries Fact File* (DCMS, 2002) detailed how certain knowledge industries, including broadcasting, are central to the prosperity of the country. It demanded inclusion because it set forth an accorded economic role, indicative of the weight this Government has given to the media. Likewise, the DTI's (1998) *Building the Knowledge Economy* detailed the Government's plans to harness the power these technologies potentially hold. These documents therefore provided a clear sense of where the Government stands on this issue, its main strategy and overall aims. The variety of sources, each espousing similar ideas, indicated that there was a coherent policy for new media and digital television owing to the manner in which they had been defined as important.

Closely observing the machinery of Government highlighted how New Labour had created a specially designated office and post to deal with the importance of digital communication. The Office of the Electronic Envoy was established to investigate the full range of applications electronic media potentially hold and to promote their take-up. I therefore followed closely the activities of this office and the

documentation it released, some of which detailed exactly what the Government were planning for the new communications technologies, including digital television. It became clear that a theme of enabling all individuals to use these innovations because of the efficiency they add to routine activities was a clear objective of Government. The literature of the e-envoy also contained take-up figures which I needed to use to support some of the arguments I made.

The unfolding nature of this topic meant issues of communication were continually addressed in policy circles, so I had to keep pace with all of the latest developments. By following these matters it became clear that the Government's intentions were to simplify media matters by containing them within the single regulatory body OFCOM, and by instituting an overarching blueprint for the emerging system of communications as revealed by the 2003 Communications Act. In other words, the Government's ideas formed part of longer term plans, culminating in these goals, so policy was concentrated towards these overall objectives. This realisation provided me with a focus as it was clear that they were the major plans of action the Government had, as could be detected within the on going debates.

Since OFCOM's inauguration, there has been a glut of research on the industrial issues associated with the new communications technologies. I found it necessary to consult documents such as OFCOM (2004b) *The State of the Communications Market 2004* and OFCOM (2004a) *Driving Digital Switchover* because they were the most up-to-date work on the trends within the industry and the issues involved in switchover. They were therefore documents that addressed particular issues of importance, hence their inclusion, but also gave an indication of the regulator's overall role. Additionally, I drew from similar research produced by other institutions. The BBC released documents on take-up figures, which gave me an idea of how digital television had progressed, and switchover, which also detailed some of the primary issues and strategies. I also consulted the websites of the broadcasting institutions themselves regularly to gauge how important they felt digital television might be.

The next point for consideration concerns the actual analysis of the material collected. Blaxter et al (1996:187) offer a technique of examination by stressing that

each piece needs to be assessed for its underlying assumptions and also for how it relates to those in previous documents. This highlights the principles in operation and how they are anchored over time. Abstracting from each elements that are deemed to be important and collating them together from other sources shows the themes in question and the way they are being dealt with (ibid.). For this project, the manner in which the areas of technology, policy and programming were addressed and the implications for the theoretical concerns comprised the style in which the documents were read. Franklin (2001:16) instructs to thematically examine matter by grouping crucial strands with each other, a tactic that enables the researcher to trace their origin and course over a range of sources because it reveals their significance to the full. I did this by looking at how the same issues were framed over a range of documents and if there was a coherence or division in regards to how they were addressed.

· Following matters in the press also helped to identify important developments because reports drew attention to the latest policy occurrences. A major source of information for the project has been newspaper articles which have provided an up-to-date snapshot of what is happening in regards to the topic. While there are problems in relying on newspapers as evidence in their own right (Scott, 1990:2), they acted as an invaluable guide to major occurrences in the field as they happened because they revealed general trends. With the rapidity of technological and regulatory change, the press provided pointers to what was happening, who the decision-makers were and the core documents that were shaping the television landscape. They showed the various actors across different Government departments and outside the formal policy process responsible for moulding the shape of digital television. Therefore, newspapers served as an initial entry point into the area, signposting attention towards the documents in which the intricacies of digital television were to be dealt with.

· Whilst any reliance on documents is necessarily selective I am confident that the ones I have selected are the most viable sources because they address the notion of communications technologies directly and lay down a direction for policy. Other Government sources confirmed the general importance Labour has given to new communications technologies as it became clear that other departments were relying upon new communications technologies for their own operations. I thus drew from the websites of the Department for Education and Skills and the Cabinet Office

because both expressed that their work was now increasingly dependent upon communications technologies. It became clear the Government was intended for all to use these technologies and was aiming to provide an example to other institutions by converting all of its services into electronically deliverable formats. Additionally, the document *Opportunity for all in a world of change* addressed the general theme of improving society. This source revealed that while the Government intended to better society unilaterally, electronic communications were central to the theme of progress. All of this shows that while there were specific plans for electronic media detailed within the departments responsible, the relevance of the technology intruded much further because it found its way into other areas of Government and was altering the manner in which they were approaching their core duties.

Lastly, I utilised online versions of speeches given by key individuals. I felt these could be used as primary evidence because they revealed the intentions of major actors involved within the development of digital television. The aim here was simply to clarify the official stance and measures implemented to achieve such ends. So, examining a speech made by Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport confirmed how important digital television is to the Government, the range of issues involved within the transition, and how a number of issues such as public service are to be couched. In other words, speeches provided detail on the importance given to the issue, how it was framed and the measures developed for its resolution. Similarly, a speech made by Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry displayed how important the Government feels electronic communications are to the nation's wealth, how they function and what they are hoped to achieve. I took a comparable approach when analysing presentations made by the senior command structure of OFCOM in order to find out how they were positioning the new regulator when setting its scope of authority. These speeches, by Chief Executive Officer Stephen Carter and Chairman Lord Currie, revealed how the regulator had been set up and its framework of operation, along with the plans designed to that effect.

Overall, documents constituted the main tool within my research because of the nature of the project. A new development has to be initiated by official measures and the analysis of documents indicated how vital it was perceived to be because it illuminated the hopes set out for digital television and the array of issues involved.

There was a clear orientation of communications technology into a particular direction and long term plans, manifest in the two departments and the specially created Government office, all of which established a plan of action for digital television. The literature these bodies released was therefore crucial to the manner in which the issues were dealt with because they set forth the official plans. The fact that Government objectives led to a huge piece of legislation like the 2003 Communications Act indicated how New Labour had a long-term overall strategy to redesign communications into a particular shape to bolster the economic and cultural importance it feels the sector holds. It was clear that Labour felt the increased importance of the communications industries necessitated a plan of action that sought to reform its regulatory apparatus as well as the formulation of a blue print for the future development of the whole sphere.

There are doubts over the critical worth of policy research with commentators levelling the serious charge that work of this kind may unequivocally serve the interests of the system (Scott, 1990:59; Mosco, 1996:255; Halloran, 1998:26; Deacon et al, 1999:368). These authors express concern at how such inquiries may represent the interests of the State owing to the reliance on official documentation leading to a danger of being too close to the object of study. To overcome this problem I sought to follow Halloran's (1998:27) stance of looking at the same issues as policy-makers but not necessarily on their terms, so that the topic was addressed externally with a view to challenge, making it possible to propose alternatives. I engaged with the policy matter critically, interrogating the key assumptions and some of the overall objectives. Such an approach was intended to illuminate the overall management of the technology by allowing the research to critically engage with the topic and to identify the type of thinking evinced by those structuring digital television.

Content Study

A further research method I used concerned programming. The aim here was to investigate the output patterns of the current era, comprising of the digital and terrestrial systems, before setting them against those of the analogue era. I was attempting to construct a map of broadcasting systems in much the same way that

Raymond Williams (1990) does in his classic study that observed key elements of difference between various systems, and across the channels within any of those systems. The objective was therefore identical in that I was attempting to *systematically compare* television output across multiple levels in order to gauge the sorts of programming patterns that have emerged in different circumstances. Indeed, Ewington (2002:37) instructs to analyse programme schedules quantitatively and qualitatively as a method of capturing the nature of the changes that have gone on within the industry. That is, as the end product, my focus on programming was intended to expose some of the shifts in content that have typified recent years.

. I reasoned that the most prudent means with which to do this was through a content study because it concerns itself with scientifically classifying media output. I set about the television schedules with an approach that could examine the distribution of programme categories in order to highlight any changes across the numerous channels and systems. Such quantitative research was intended to give empirical verification to different factors and to highlight any major changes that may have emerged. Krippendorff (2004:18) explains that this method is designed to scientifically quantify a range of variables within output. Its strength lies in its ability to catch reoccurrences of factors to illuminate how the research object has been constructed at different times. I felt it was the most useful way of trying to grasp some of the defining features of television because it is a tool that can generate data and quantify the programming patterns.

As any classification of content aims to quantify relative amounts of a given variable, I set about establishing the groupings that would make a direct comparison possible¹. I reasoned that genre would be the main focus because, as Burton (2000:33) advances, it leads to an understanding of the financing and marketing within broadcasting institutions. Looking at the composition of genres would make clear how broadcasters have allocated their resources to particular types of programmes and from here I could explore the reasons for why this was so. Breaking down the output via categories would raise how each channel was committed to certain types of programmes before confirming whether this signified any degree of change over time.

¹ I worked out the formal plan for the content study in conjunction with Professor Justin Lewis to whom I am thankful.

Krippendorff (2004:35) stresses the need for analytical constructs as a means to make sense of the research object. It is these units of categorisation that are therefore the chief mode of analysis because they enable the inquiry to highlight cleavages within the research object. Thus, an analysis of genres should be able to illustrate what types of programmes dominate on which channels and if this has altered over the period of investigation. I consulted McQueen (1998:29) as a methodological guide for the analysis of schedules because he details how to break up and scrutinise the information such sources make available. Finally, I also looked at the number of repeats and imports on each channel and system because it offered another means to compare relative amounts, thereby potentially showing other areas of significant change in television output.

The next decision related to the choice of sample against which to compare the current television system with and I was motivated here by the need to grasp the impact of some of the structural and philosophical transformations that have gone on. It therefore seemed pertinent to use the programming of a period prior to that when commercial forces have come to dictate the overall thrust of the schedules. However, I also wanted as complete a broadcasting service as possible and quickly realised that the further back I went, the less programming there would be. I settled on September 1984 as the benchmark, because it is prior to the multichannel era and also the back end of what commentators such as Bignell (2004:47) consider to be the 'Golden Age' of broadcasting. It was also a moment at which there was quite a full television service, as Channel 4 had recently begun and Breakfast TV had also been launched.

I decided to examine one whole month's programming because this was, I felt, a sufficiently lengthy enough time frame to capture long term trends. Shorter periods suffer from the potential problem of having an external factor potentially skew the figures. I proceeded to collect microfiche copies of *The Times* newspaper because it had quite detailed descriptions of programmes and also marked repeats clearly. I did not use the *Radio Times* because in 1984 it carried only the BBC's programmes and so I would have had to collect the *TV Times* of the same weeks. By using *The Times*, I was able to collect listings for all the channels on a single sheet for each day in 1984. I did not encounter any methodological problems through using two different sources

for each sample because the listings of *The Times* in 1984 had sufficient information from which it was possible to classify the content, and I was able to further check details on individual programming from the Internet Movie Database.

In terms of the actual categories, I used as many classifications of programmes as possible. Whilst this did make the analysis harder because it meant more time had to be spent breaking up the programmes, it subsequently bought a greater degree of certainty to the groupings in the sense that it was far easier to see exactly how the schedules of each channel have been composed. It also left the possibility of collapsing categories at a later date if necessary.

I did begin by analysing the whole schedule for 1984 but this proved to be far too difficult as I progressed. Some of the day time output, particularly BBC2's Open University programmes, were not marked as repeats. Also, it was not entirely clear how some of these day time programmes could be classified because the descriptions in the listings were very slight. As a result I decided to confine my analysis from 5pm-12 midnight for each day within the month. This had the benefit of certainty because all the repeats within the time frame were marked and there were also fuller descriptions of the evening programmes. It also meant the analysis was concentrated around prime time, which has generally featured as the main concern for broadcasters in their scheduling decisions.

Genres and imports were established by consulting the Internet Movie Database. This proved to be a most helpful resource as it had details of programmes going back to the 1980's (and beyond) and also revealed the country of origin. From here I could construct accurate categories of programme and also work out which were imported. These three variables of repeats, imports and genres were to constitute the modes of analysis for the study in that each channel and overall system would be analysed according to the relative amounts of these criteria. This gave me a quite full set of data in that I could observe how many repeats and imports each channel and overall system was comprised of, along with the proportion of genres. I did all of this for the 1984 channels and also for the terrestrial channels of the current (2004) terrestrial channels. For the current systems I used the *Radio Times* of September 2004 from where I could check the repeats because they had been marked. Genres and

imports were for the most part self-evident, but I did nevertheless check them via the Internet Movie Database as well as the websites of the channels themselves, which often had detailed descriptions of individual programmes.

The digital system proved to be more difficult. Firstly, I had to decide which channels to select as it would be impossible to examine all of them. As there are hundreds of channels I decided to analyse those with the highest profiles and audience figures. Also, the idea that they should be general, rather than specialist, channels was important as it meant they would not be composed of a low number of the same sort of genres. The following table indicates my choice and reveals these are amongst the most successful digital channels:

Table 2.1 Audience Share of Digital Channels Selected

Channel	% Within Total Audience	% Within Multichannel Homes
E4	0.6	1.0
BBC3	0.5	0.8
BBC4	0.2	0.3
Sky One	1.5	2.2
ITV 2	1.2	1.8
Total	4	6.1

Source: BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2005:138.

Table 2.1 conveys that these channels have some of the highest audience figures within the digital system. While there were others, such as BBC News 24, that were as popular, the fact that the above were relatively mixed channels meant a genre analysis was still viable. The relative success of these channels resulted in there being more details about their programming within the schedules. Such information was important for the empirical analysis that I conducted because it allowed me to calculate the programme types quite easily. Also, these channels are projects of the main British broadcasters and most have a presence on the Freeview platform.

I was able to check the genres and imports for these channels as I had for all of the others with constant reference to the Internet Movie Database. Repeats proved to be more difficult as they were not marked in most cases. Trawling through the schedules revealed very quickly why this was so, as the channels were dependent upon repeating output for most of their airtime. In many instances it was the novelty of a new episode which the *Radio Times* marked, rather than the other way round. I was able to work out which programmes were repeated by looking at the websites for each channel, which often said when a new show was first broadcast. I also looked at back copies of the television schedules to see if the programmes had been shown previously. Even then, I could not be sure if all of the output was repeated so I only counted those which I am certain have been shown before. The caveat in relation to the repeats for the digital system therefore is that all of the figures are *at least* the amount the channels have shown before. I would be inclined to believe that the actual number is higher but those which I have counted I am certain are repeat programmes. After collecting such data I was able to work out the percentages manually and compile charts in exactly the same manner as I had done for the other data sets.

While the main thrust of this study was empirical I did attempt to supplement the figures this type of approach generates with a qualitative dimension by noting down significant changes that the figures could not capture. This related to changes in the style of the genres, later placements within the schedules of particular types of programme and the continual repeating of a successful show. I recorded all of these features as I progressed and then scrutinised the schedules a few times solely from this angle so as to pick up on any major differences in how channels are organised. This type of analysis did reveal some notable differences between the three systems, although its main purpose was as an adjunct to the quantitative approach in the sense that it might enhance those findings by adding salient observations that the statistics did not highlight.

Interviews

I felt that it was necessary to supplement these tools with another method that could offer the sorts of benefits they were unable to supply. Hansen et al (1998:1) advance how good research benefits from a combination of methods in that it produces a deeper understanding of the issues at the core of the project. That is, in order to comprehend the full significance of the research topic it was essential to utilise other instruments which could illuminate it in a way that archives and a content study could not. I chose interviews to add greater weight to the analysis because of the possibilities they offered in generating a particular type of data. Blaxter et al (1996:153) confirm the worth when stating how this is extremely useful for collecting data which cannot be found using other techniques because it allows the researcher to directly scrutinise some-one with thorough knowledge of the subject-matter.

There are however different types of interview, each serving distinct research purposes that are defined by the objectives of specific studies. I decided to use the type of approach that come under the 'qualitative' banner in that the interviews were tailored towards individuals, rather than a survey type approach that asks all respondents the same thing. Such interviews are sometimes prefixed with the word 'depth' because they enable the researcher to gain what Hornig Priest (1996:106) labels an 'insider's perspective' by tapping into the thoughts of those actors intimately involved in something, allowing the project to benefit from their expertise. Wimmer and Dominick (2003:127) call them intensive interviews because they foster a penetration of the subject matter and feel they should be specifically customised to individual respondents. So, I intended to interview people with an authority on the topic to probe their knowledge in such a way that it would reinforce or challenge the material gained through archival research.

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996:232) state how interviews must be constructed in order to elicit answers pertinent to the research hypothesis. This was to be achieved by weaving in the central issues of the inquiry into the discussions to ensure that the respondents offered commentary on the future of television along the areas of technology, policy and programming. In the initial phase of my research I

attended a few conferences, seminars and speeches such as those organised by the Welsh Media Forum on the broad subject². These events provided me with an opportunity to see from an early stage how broadcasters themselves conceived of this innovation and how they felt it impacted on the nature of their work. I did speak informally to some of these professionals but never for any great length of time. Nevertheless, these encounters did help me within the formative part of the research process to get a sense of what this technology involved and how broadcasters were designing their strategies in the light of it.

However, the only positive feed back I received from numerous emails I sent out was from Peter Madry, a senior Broadcasting policy technology officer at OFCOM, and Alan Griffiths, senior partner of the consultancy firm e-communications. I sent a speculative e-mail to OFCOM and Madry replied intimating that he was able to discuss matters over which he had knowledge, namely switchover and the general issues associated with the role of the newly formed regulator. He was useful because of his involvement with implementing some of the things I had read about. Thus, I was able to scrutinise more deeply the steps involved in creating an all digital system of communications. I chose Griffiths because of his years of experience within the industry at many different institutions. He was helpful chiefly though his role as a technologist which helped me clarify some of the innovations going on and their industrial implications.

Regarding the actual form of the interviews I designed them to be as free flowing as possible so long as the issues central to this project were addressed. Babbie (1998:290) explains that a qualitative interview is essentially a conversation where the interviewer establishes the general direction and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent. Deacon et al (1999:65) call it a conversation with a purpose because it should abandon concern with standardisation by seeking to promote an open-ended dialogue. This means the researcher gains data on the topic whilst also allowing the respondent to express their views freely. The fact is that the flexibility they have enables the discussion to develop openly within the parameters set by the research objectives. Both the interviews I conducted were organic in the sense that I modified

² Many of these occasions were in Cardiff during the period 1999-2001.

pre-prepared questions in the light of the responses given³. These questions were related to my research questions in that they probed the same issues of the main research areas. I thus focused on the technological, policy and programming areas when I devised my questions, many of which I worked out my supervisor. The interview questions were intended to develop the main questions as set out on page 24 in order to probe further into the research areas of the project. I was thus able to examine the areas of technology, policy and programming by asking these experts what they felt the main implications of digitalisation were likely to be through formulating questions that would elicit direct answers on these three aspects.

In effect, the interviews were conversations on specific areas that these individuals had expertise on and I was able to direct the flow of the discussion onto the salient areas of my research through the questions asked and the rapport generated. The questions were ordered in what Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996:260) call a funnel sequence in that each successive question had a progressively narrower scope. The topic was therefore explored in greater depth as the interview progressed, allowing sub-themes to be targeted and discussed at further length. It also meant the entire encounter was structured around the main statement of the future of television, which I gradually worked up to by focusing on the important strands that these individuals felt determined its shape. So, while I entered into each interview with an agenda in mind, this was modified depending on the direction of the conversation. Both interviews went well and the interviewees supported the material I gained from the document research. Whilst I was disappointed not to be able to arrange more interviews, I was happy with those I did get, although the experience illuminated how time consuming such a method would be.

I found it quite straightforward to utilise the material gleaned from this research method. Blaxter et al (1996:190) feel that interview matter should be analysed question by question, analogous to the general approach in documentary analysis. So, the way in which each theme was addressed had to be captured by looking at how it was conceptualised at various points throughout the encounter. I examined the responses the two individuals gave me at length on such a basis. From

³ See Appendix A on pages 337 to 339 for a full list of these.

here, I was able to place the pertinent details gained from the interviewees in the relevant parts of the thesis without any problems.

Overview

The chapter has set out a complete research design for the project by outlining what aspects of the topic are to be studied and the methods that will assist the process of clarifying the nature of change. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996:8) assert that research must produce the sort of knowledge that makes it possible to understand, explain and predict the phenomena being studied. While the focus of this project is centred around gaining a comprehension of the future, it aims to understand this by looking at emerging patterns in the present. Thorough knowledge of the present then carries with it an ability to make sense of the future, and this chapter has provided the formula for how the inquiry proceeds. It has marked out clear ideas on how to tackle the subject-area and to fulfil what Wimmer and Dominick (2003:5) regard as the purposes of research to discover things, evaluate problems and describe what is going on. I have drawn extensively from Negrine (1998b:67) who shows how research has to go about understanding the changes in structure and organisation of communication systems brought about by new communications technologies. The overall aim has been to produce a thorough and scholarly project and this chapter has detailed exactly how that is to be achieved, an objective that in itself has made the research plan easier to operationalise and conduct.

I have provided an outline of the research process of this project by detailing the steps involved and the tools required. I moved from a general statement, through to specific questions which directed me towards certain themes that in themselves called for particular tools suited towards those issues. The intricacies of my research activity have been documented, revealing the ebb and flow of the research process, where I had to modify my plans in the light of developments in the field and problems I encountered. For instance, while I wanted to gain more interviews, I was constrained by the lack of responses I received. This called for a greater dependence on documents, where I was quite fortunate in that more official material on the topic was released as time progressed. By utilising this matter extensively as my primary

evidence the lack of interviews was I felt less serious than if there had been no such documents in circulation.

Otherwise, my research functioned fairly smoothly once I had settled upon the research questions. The framing of these dictated what areas of the topic to probe and the methods necessary for this examination. I have demonstrated that the need to answer questions on the technological, political and programming areas of digital television has led to a reliance on certain research tools that are designed for such purposes. I have been able to uncover findings that detail what digital television is, the political plans for it and the sorts of output it produces. Other tools would not have been able to answer the concerns of the study, so the task focused chiefly on developing the questions fully. More intricate questions then emerged, such as which documents? Which schedules? The effect of this is that certain areas of digital television have been glossed over. I have been unable to examine the transformations within the industry or the individual usage of the innovations to see if the process of viewing has been altered. However, it was not possible to cover all of the issues associated with this fundamental transformation and I have shown awareness of their importance. As a project concerned with issues of structure, I feel I have covered the main areas in the right way that such a focus demands.

Chapter 3: History – A Series of Quantum Leaps

This chapter draws extensively upon history in order to understand some of the current technological changes going on in television by identifying the forces, institutions and actors that have historically moulded the shape of the medium and the aims they have set out for it. Pegg (1983:218) argues that such a method reveals how and where the technology has entered into public life, the contributions it has made and the manner in which it has fostered new relationships. Television has been through previous incarnations when the interplay of structuring forces have driven it into certain directions and towards specified objectives. A historical perspective therefore highlights the decisions that have governed the shape of the medium and pinpoints an array of important thematic strands through the course of a century to see how such key ideas have been anchored and interpreted.

Dividing its life-cycle into distinct phases makes it possible to detect how television has been formed at certain times, revealing how and where change has occurred to give an overall sense of the medium's evolution. This account seeks to situate the technological developments in relation to the wider social, political and cultural environment that Scannell and Cardiff (1991:XII) insist provides the most complete picture of how broadcasting has developed and interacted with society, alongside the wider implications of this exchange. History therefore acts as a context from which the contemporary transition to digital television can be fully understood in relation to a broader canvas. Indeed, Uricchio (2002:219) claims "history may provide both the perspective and the insight needed to read and learn from this transformation". Such an analysis focuses on the themes which need to be probed and in doing so, shows what happens to crucial areas when television shifts by emphasising the driving force behind change and the philosophy that motivates it.

Radio

The origins of television lie in radio which provided it with an established framework of operation and set of institutions to guide it. Thus, it is imperative to explore how radio evolved, paying attention to the way in which it was formulated in response to a historically specific political and social climate before evaluating the subsequent development of television. The technology of sound broadcasting as a message originating from a central node emitted to an infinite number of recipients emerged through a series of discoveries over a number of years in the late nineteenth century (Burns, 1977:2). Progression came about from a cohort of disparate inventors spread across different countries who were chiefly motivated by scientific endeavour.

Briggs (1961:5) notes how these pioneers had little idea of the social significance of what they were doing as their interests lay in the technical aspects of wireless innovations. Out of these, the Italian Guglielmo Marconi has been highly regarded as he combined many of the insights that had been made and also attempted to exploit the business potential he believed they offered (Crisell, 1997:10). Marconi's endeavours to improve the magnitude and quality of transmissions were successful to such an extent that by the early years of the twentieth century the conveyance of sound had garnered a small but enthusiastic following. Incremental advancements in regards to the technical quality and distance a signal could travel led the State into using point-to-point communication for certain purposes such as the guiding of vessels in the pre war years (Williams, 1998:90). The notion of broadcasting as a particular sender-receiver model of communication had not yet been conceived as wireless technology was being used to communicate a message between two singular points. Briggs (1961:34) highlights the major difficulty this encountered was that messages could be picked up by listeners for whom the information was not intended.

With the onset of war in 1914 control of wireless technology passed to the authorities who were to utilise it for military purposes. The security issues surrounding communication of this kind led to a reluctance on the part of the military authorities to relinquish their command of it in the immediate post war period. Williams (1998:90) argues that such thinking demonstrates how wireless was already

being conceived as a national resource by the State. After the war, private enthusiasts rejoined the fray as amateur societies flourished and it is these that constituted a pressure group upon Government to expand and organise wireless technology (Pegg, 1983:67). The manufacturers of wireless sets also formed a significant presence and helped to stimulate State policy towards the technology. Curran and Seaton (1991:132) emphasise that these commercial enterprises believed there was a potentially huge market for their items given the fascination exhibited amongst many of the amateur associations and the growing body of private users. These businesses needed the Government to create conditions under which the full market potential of the technology could be exploited. Gorham (1952:23) stresses that the increased demands exerted by the rising number of pressure groups persuaded Government there was a future for this new fad, although it was not clear what this would be.

The answers were to come from the American experience of the technology, where David Sarnoff of the American Marconi Company was convinced wireless could become a household utility and set about structuring it in such a fashion that it could achieve this (Smith, 1973:49). Broadcasting as is now understood, the conveyance of information over vast distances from a single point to a multitude of receivers, was his vision of how wireless transmission could be utilised as a domestic consumer device. However, the competitive system in the USA engendered a 'chaos on the ether' with several broadcasters operating on a limited spectrum space thereby encroaching on the strength of the overall signal (Crisell, 1997:12). The British authorities perceived this as a lack of planning with serious consequences for the quality of the subsequent services in terms of cultural value and technical clarity. Official discussions in the post war period centred on amalgamating the largest domestic wireless firms to form a consortium on the basis that co-operation amongst the major players rather than competition would stimulate the sale of hardware and also generate the strongest possible signal (Paulu, 1961:10).

It was out of these circumstances that organised broadcasting emerged with the formation of the British Broadcasting Company in November 1922 with John Reith as General Manager. Burns (1977:3) outlines how the enterprise was to be governed at all points by the oversight of Government officials. This indicates the esteem the technology was held in and the perceived need for control and planning in

terms of its organisation and administration. Finance was to come from a levy on the sale of the sets and a licence fee payable by all users. Scannell and Cardiff (1991:5) observe that two core features of British broadcasting had thus been established by the time of the formation of the BBC without any ideological rationale: the licence fee and monopoly. Williams (1998:88) meanwhile documents how the broadcast service was limited in terms of a programming schedule and geographical reach, with only the major conurbations capable of receiving services. However, broadcasting at this juncture had acquired an established technological form, the institutionalised framework of the BBC, official backing by way of Government belief that it could prosper, a strong personality at the helm, a robust means of finance and a rapidly increasing popularity with the public. This platform endowed it with a solid footing from which it was to grow.

The BBC proceeded tentatively in this early period with concerns over its feasibility, financing and purpose uppermost on the agenda of the Sykes Committee of 1923, the first inquiry into broadcasting. The overall question centred on how to devise a structure for the medium that would enable it to reach its optimum level, whatever that might be. In its deliberations, the Sykes Committee declared broadcasting to be of national importance and a medium of valuable public service (Seymour-Ure, 1996:61). The limited space for public broadcasting increased the need to use that which was available more efficiently and this was the task set for the BBC. The discussions concluded that spectrum scarcity necessitated retaining broadcasting's status as a valuable national resource, a stipulation that was to govern the manner in which the technology would be organised and its programming policy (Curran and Seaton, 1991:133).

This concern is emphasised further when it is considered that the period itself was one of severe social unrest, class conflict and the perceived threat of communism (Smith, 1973:32). For these reasons, a high degree of centralised control was deemed necessary by some in authority to avoid the possibility of content inflaming disaffected groups and destabilising social relations. However, by establishing a framework within which the technology could execute the prescribed duties of public service, the State had defined the role of the institution in such a way that day-to-day

supervision was not necessary. Thus, the BBC had been granted autonomy on the understanding that it could be trusted to act responsibly as the State saw it.

The organisation encountered financial problems initially as listeners avoided paying the royalties on the hardware by building their own sets while licence fee evasion also proved to be high (Paulu, 1961:11). Advertising was nevertheless rejected by the Sykes Committee as a means of income alongside any dependence on market forces in general owing to the perceived corrosive influence of commercialism. The dangers of advertising centred on the belief that editorial control would pass to those funding the programmes. The Sykes Enquiry concluded that such a precious resource could not be organised on a commercial basis because of the threat market forces posed to cultural standards (Scannell, 1990:13). This thinking looked to the USA where the competitive system was seen to encourage more puerile output with broadcasters chasing the audience at the expense of quality programming.

Meanwhile, there was to be only a limited news service because of the Government's insistence that the BBC should avoid issues of controversy and also to accommodate press owners who felt broadcast news would encroach on their market (Tracey, 1977:144). The BBC would remain a monopoly by being the only broadcaster, thus enjoying total responsibility for the development of the technology and immunity from competition. Throughout the first two years of its existence the company worked on attaining universal coverage by building more transmitters to reach a national audience (Briggs, 1961:213). All of this illuminates how detailed political discussions took place in order to mould radio in a particular way from which it could then be transposed fully onto the public. Scannell (1990:13) argues that the evolving broadcasting system had thus acquired a defined role and functional framework that had been laid down by the State.

Within these parameters there remained a degree of scope for exactly how the BBC and its programming could develop. The shape they did assume owes much to the control and vision Reith had for the medium, drawn from his own religious beliefs and ideas of social need. This philosophy was informed by the works of nineteenth century thinkers like Matthew Arnold who argued that education in terms of improvement of the public was a moral obligation for those in positions of authority.

Smith (1973:33) clarifies that this middle class approach of bettering the working classes through pushing onto them their own customs and habits was to constitute the social responsibility of broadcasting. The BBC thus became Reith's personal project from which moral improvement and cultural uplifting would take place because of the dispersal of knowledge. The BBC would act as the nation's righteous guardian, ensuring that radio would inform, educate as well as entertain the audience.

His contribution is well summed up by Boyle (1972:143) who claims that he had a high moral drive, astounding energy and a messianic outlook that was projected onto the organisation. Reith was able to put his imprint upon the BBC because of the courage of his convictions, their appeal to the political authorities and the determination with which he adhered to these values. In doing so he helped to establish the cultural centrality of the Corporation and the status of radio. Kumar (1986:49) surmises how certain commentators have lauded Reith for making the BBC into a national institution of formidable prestige and authority which it achieved by working as a reliable and responsible safe depository of the nation's cultural capital.

With a defined purpose in mind and a strongly determined personality to take it there, radio's scope was fixed. Scannell (1990:14) points out that Reith's plan was to open up 'higher' pleasures to people who had ordinarily been denied them through social status and/or lack of income. The preoccupation was with high rather than popular culture and Scannell and Cardiff (1991:16) reveal that this thinking invokes a qualitative definition of standards in that it regards something intrinsic within the cultural form itself that renders it worthy. Thus, an enlightened public could only be created by disseminating high subject matter deemed important through an aesthetically superior programming form. Boyle (1972:151) explains how Reith came to this line of thinking because giving the audience what it wanted "would have turned the BBC into a spiritual whore-house, himself into a cultural pimp". In other words, the public did not know what was best for them and instead needed to be guided towards this.

Lambert (1982:6) remarks how the BBC constructed its own picture of the nature and interests of the audience it served. Output in this phase revolved around the highbrow, including classical music, intellectual discussions and religious services. In

time, the sparse schedule would be dominated by sport, children's programmes, State occasions and royal ceremonies (Windlesham, 1980:22). Reith aimed for a mixed schedule with the reasoning that the audience would be best served by a variety of content types. Crisell (1997:23) clarifies that the diet of mixed programming actually worked within boundaries of high culture so that provision centred on what this viewpoint regards as rightfully tasteful in each category.

Reith's conception of public service also centred on creating a national message, uniting local differences across a common cultural axis that would enable individuals to see themselves as part of a bigger community. The aim of broadcasting was to reach as wide an audience as possible regardless of class, age, social status, gender or locality with the same message in order to radiate an inclusive consensus. This was to be attained by applying a particular creed of 'Britishness' that was more in tune with middle class conceptions of nationhood in terms of the unified projections conveyed. Burns (1977:42) explains that Reith turned the BBC into a kind of domestic diplomatic service representing the best of British as he saw it. Patriotic effusions of State ceremonies were to form a distinguishing feature in the BBC's early remit to ensure nationhood could be celebrated by articulating a close identification with the monarchy.

Reith therefore composed a designated purpose for broadcasting congruent with the institutional arrangements that it had to function within, features which made its moral tasks easier. Negrine (1994:82) points out that the licence fee provided a yearly income permitting a programming policy to be developed with little regard for the wishes of the audience. Limited spectrum space created a strong argument for the BBC's status as a monopoly so that audience share would be uncontested, meaning that it did not have to engage in competition. Williams (1998:96) describes how the overall defining features of the emerging broadcasting terrain were therefore woven into an ideological whole by Reith. A patterned conceptual blanket of public service was formulated to effectively envelop the BBC's market status, institutionalised set-up, internal structure, funding arrangements and programming policy to comprise a total vision.

The Crawford Committee began its deliberations into broadcasting in 1925 and were heavily impressed upon by Reith to liberate the institution from commercial considerations completely by converting it into a public utility (Paulu, 1961:8). Before the committee's recommendations could be assessed, most of which largely endorsed the Reithian stance, the severe class unrest that had come to typify the historical circumstances landed the BBC with an examination of its credibility in which its performance would dictate how Government would deal with it thereafter. The General Strike in 1926 amounted to a serious national crisis in which large sections of the industrial workforce downed tools and brought the country to an alarming halt. Since it found itself as the only supplier of up to date information during the crisis, the BBC assumed an importance not just in the reporting of issues but also in the possibility of altering the course of events.

Franklin (1997:121) outlines how the BBC set up a regular news service with bulletins throughout the day contrasting with its flimsy provision prior to the strike. Moreover, a professional template emerged of how the BBC would cover political issues from that point onwards. While the Government did have the power of take-over, the BBC's consensual style of reporting rendered this unnecessary as its interpretation of impartiality did not offend the established political order (Tracey, 1977:147). By taking the official stance towards the dispute the BBC secured its own future by simultaneously demonstrating to those in power the potency of radio and the ideological framework from which it operated. Despite complaints of partiality from the strikers, the BBC did gain a measure of credibility by proving it was a largely independent institution rather than a Government department. Windlesham (1980:24) argues that the General Strike is therefore a defining moment in the Corporation's history, enabling it to enshrine its reputation at the same time as creating a national audience for radio.

From here the BBC demonstrated to State authorities that it could be trusted because of its acquiescent reporting stance, and the decision for it to become a Corporation in 1927 was granted, enabling Reith to execute its moral duties more effectively. Briggs (1961:7) explains that broadcasting's journey up until this moment can be characterised as one from novelty to acceptance, whereby it gradually solidified its presence to become a considerable national force, immersing itself in the

issues of the day and forging a unique point of contact for audiences to enjoy new experiences. The next decade was to be of consolidation and growth as the institution matured by providing more jobs, expanding its output and developing its networks into national and regional sectors. Moreover, the latter illuminates how broadcasting had grown beyond its original Reithian national confines to create a localised relationship with the audience.

Content remained largely highbrow and the social upheavals of the period did not get much representation in BBC output (Curran and Seaton, 1991:145). Pegg (1983:192) argues that the transmission of the Jubilee celebrations of 1935 and the Coronation of 1937 established a new sense of intimacy and involvement between the monarchy and the public. Royalty remained its chief focus and the increasing coverage of sport was designed to fulfil the same purpose of collective identity. The Reithian project though was not entirely successful after it emerged in the early 1930's that audiences had been tuning into foreign commercial stations such as Radio Normandy and Radio Luxembourg for the more popular programmes they offered (Kumar, 1986:51). Since the BBC could not develop a mass audience for high brow fare, it was forced into expressing a degree of sensitivity towards audience demand for the first time in its history. This it did by setting up the Listener Research Section in 1936 to discover what sort of services audiences wanted and whether they were satisfied with the existing programmes (Crisell, 1997:41). Reith, increasingly disillusioned with some of these changes to the institution he had created and his steadily decreasing control of it, resigned in 1938.

Commentators agree that the performance of the BBC during World War II greatly enhanced its reputation and exemplified the power of radio. Kumar (1986:55) stresses that the BBC developed a closer empathy with its audience by providing more popular forms of entertainment that they wanted to hear. The research gleaned from the Listener Section proved useful in guiding production towards output that identified with the audience by moving it away from that which was best and closer to that which was wanted. Crisell (1997:57) argues this served an ideological purpose in that it cheered people, thereby making it easier to bind them together. Curran and Seaton (1991:175) explain the BBC improved and extended its news service, and thus

progressed into a primary means of information to such an extent that by 1945 the radio had become an essential accompaniment to households.

World War II therefore demonstrated the nature and capabilities of broadcasting in general and amounted to a great achievement by the BBC given that it exhibited a commitment to the truth as far as it possibly could (Crisell, 1997:57). On the rare occasions when the BBC did engage in propaganda this has been attributed to the occasional lapse or as necessary subterfuge in a critical situation of national importance. Once again, the BBC's performance in a period of national crisis cemented its credibility as a trusty source of information. Despite radio's huge success, a challenge was building up that would realign the contours of broadcasting and from which this consumer good's supremacy would be seriously weakened, forcing the BBC to adapt.

From Radiovision to Television

The BBC's handling of television started more as an experiment rather than a serious project when it began looking into the possibilities of the technology in the late 1920's. Progress was initially slow as audio-visuality was envisaged only as a complement to the Corporation in its radio commitments, not as an end in itself. With the technical possibilities in place, the Selsdon Committee on television in 1934 deliberated its viability as a means of mass communication. They concluded that there should be a television service and entrusted the institutional responsibility to the BBC (Franklin, 1997:159). Funding and organisation were to be of the same formula as had been laid down for radio to ensure there would be as little disruption to what had become established methods. In this way, television inherited the ideological responsibilities of radio and was to be initially channelled towards identical purposes (Seymour-Ure, 1996:88).

However, Gorham (1952:115) emphasises that television offered a problem rather than a challenge to the BBC. The difficulty centred chiefly on how to develop what was believed to be an inherently trivial medium with meagre resources at the same time as maintaining the success of radio. An influential body of senior

management within the BBC, including Reith, regarded television as deeply puerile because of its reliance on the sensory perception of sight, which they believed relegated the substance of discourse behind that which could be seen. In other words, television would make a visual appeal to the audience at the detriment of serious discussion. Wyndham Goldie (1977:19) sums up how few within the organisation trusted television as a means to convey news and current affairs and therefore did not take it seriously. This prevailing mood inhibited its development and was indicative of a lack of trust the technology was initially held in. Additionally, expense was a major concern with production of output up to twelve times as much more for the broadcasting of the same material via television as compared to radio which amounted to far more resources than a cash-strapped BBC could afford at the time (Gorham, 1952:160). For these reasons the BBC did not embrace television and instead regarded it simply as the scientific enhancement of radio because it added a creative factor by relaying the visual to the main communicative purpose of sound.¹

The BBC began a limited television service in 1936 with reception confined to south east England. Given that it was considered to be radio with pictures the majority of its output was shared, with studio shots of sound broadcasts forming a major component of its schedule (Williams, 1998:152). The novelty of transmissions were suspended at the outbreak of World War II leaving the BBC to get on with the serious business of radio. When the service resumed in 1946 its development was left to the general aims of post-war reconstruction rather than a specific broadcasting policy. Wyndham Goldie (1977:35) stresses that there was a growing belief in political and industrial circles that the manufacture of television equipment was capable of expansion and could provide an economic surplus.

The problem was that the BBC needed a substantial increase in the licence fee to mature a new medium at the same time as maintaining the success of the older one. For the public, the cost of television sets was prohibitive and the viewing experience was poor given that audiences had to sit in darkened rooms in order to watch it (Williams, 1998:152). Briggs (1979:200) meanwhile reinforces this when describing

¹ The broadcasting historian Asa Briggs uses the term 'radiovision' to capture the idea that television was originally conceived as illustrated radio (1979:7).

how the sets were large and clunky, requiring furniture to be rearranged in the domestic space prior to viewing. Moreover, the period was one of acute austerity with rationing still in effect and little extra disposable income to spend on consumer items (Tunstall, 1983:33). This was a serious impediment to the development of the medium because it limited the available consumer base to an elite few, thereby constraining substantive growth. Briggs (1979:10) argues that within these economic circumstances the Labour Government regarded television as a luxury toy and were therefore uncommitted to its progress. The Beveridge Report in 1947 advocated a slow and incremental approach to the development of the medium, and despite being critical of the BBC, protected the Corporation's monopoly. Similarly, Wyndham Goldie (1977:52) outlines how antipathy to the medium remained within the BBC for the remainder of the decade, manifesting itself in the poor physical conditions allocated to its operations and the unimaginative schedule. Thus, television stuttered forward with a limited Reithian remit of moral education.

By 1950, signs of upturn appeared from which television was to garner a base that would enable it to instil itself into people's lives. The nature of these changes were not technological, although Briggs (1979:227) confirms that by the early 1950's the quality of transmissions had improved and the price of the sets had markedly fallen to encourage take-up. Rather, the chief explanation can be found in the changing social patterns of the period which provided a suitable context into which the medium could be successfully diffused. Ellis (2002:40) contends that with electricity being pumped into the home and the mass manufacture of goods, television had a set of domestic conditions that stimulated its absorption. Television could be an everyday item because its household nature cohered with an increasingly domesticated mode of consumption that characterised the twentieth century. Just as radio had been embedded into family routines, television could follow the same entry point into the home to establish itself.

Moreover, Corner (1991:1) explains that developments in television during the 1950's occurred when Government efforts to reconstruct the British economy were situated within a particular strand of social democratic capitalism. Political duty centred on sustaining the economy at the same time as retaining a high element of social welfarism in line with the collective experience of the war effort. The economic

boom during the 1950's gave rise to an explosion in luxury household goods and leisure time, and this increased prosperity acted as social backdrop for the acceptance of the medium. Negrine (1998a:7) argues that changes in the social make-up of Britain gave rise to different views on the role of broadcasting within society and provided a new context for the evolution of broadcasting policies. Full employment, a balance of payments surplus and rapid industrial growth aligned to the rise in leisure time created a space for the medium and defined a role for it that was more in tune with the mood of the time. Corner (1991:2) argues that this period of economic buoyancy was reflected in the changing attitudes towards the medium, where new ideas of its purpose were being formulated.

The political mind-set towards broadcasting changed significantly in these surroundings, with the State eager to use television to reflect the particular circumstances that were taking root. The Conservatives regained office in 1951 and immediately adopted a more proactive approach to television with many within the party regarding it as a medium for the future that could contribute to the Tory ethic of enterprise. Rather than follow the recommendations of Beveridge, they sought to implement the plans of their own MP Selwyn Lloyd, whose minority report was to become the blueprint for commercial television (Wheeler, 1997:90). Lloyd argued that the television system was in need of substantial improvement if it was to fulfil its total potential. His angle was largely economic, attacking the BBC on the grounds that as a monopoly it assumed excessive power and was of an unwieldy size that constituted a hindrance to technological innovation (Wilson, 1961:56). The need was therefore to induct a new entrant in the field that would not replicate the same problems. This viewpoint espoused change via commercial broadcasting on the basis that competition would prioritise audiences and that the nature of such an institution would benefit the economy.

In this same period, there was intense lobbying by commercial interests and advertisers eager to cash in on the financial opportunities commercial television could bring (Hood and Tabery-Peterssen, 1997:31). Briggs confirms that by the early 1950's there were more retail goods on the market because of the flourishing consumer economy and advertisers intent on selling them (1979:926). They joined the campaign to open up television as they saw it as a natural selling medium. Wilson (1961:79)

points out that several of the Conservative MP's supporting commercial television had business interests with these companies and therefore acted as spokesmen on their behalf on this issue. With political and industrial support, the forces for change had gained sufficient momentum to accelerate the progression of a new type of channel.

The major event which conveyed television's potency was the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, when it proved that it was not just a diffusion point for radio but a medium in its own right. Sendall (1982:19) argues this was a huge success for the BBC as it exhibited broadcasting skills that confirmed the Corporation's standards were as high in television as they had been for radio. Moreover, an estimated 56% of the nation watched the service, far more than those that listened to it (Crisell, 1997:75). Just as importantly, it affirmed television's unique contributions to the communication of information through highlighting the visual impact the medium could make. This demonstrated not only the public appetite for television but illustrated that it could perform Reithian duties effectively with viewers sharing in the veneration of the State from the sense of nationhood projected. Ellis (2002:44) describes how the Coronation convinced a generation they needed a television set because it built up a national audience for the medium and illuminated its powers so clearly. The concerns over its durability and puerile nature by those who had doubted its appeal swiftly dissipated, while regulatory attention shifted on developing the medium further given its immense possibilities.

These machinations culminated in 1954, when the Government implemented the Television Act from which Independent Television (ITV) and its regulator, the Independent Television Authority (ITA) came about. The commercial television system was arranged on a regional basis with different companies, each operating within a geographical locale enabling them to offer a distinct service to their own viewers. This was to function within an overall network where programmes could be shared between the regions and substantial public service obligations were in effect (Crisell, 1997:84). Output would also have to appeal to audiences in order to gain advertising finance, thereby making the system responsive to audience demand to some extent. ITV was subject to heavy regulatory restrictions on vulgarity, taste and decency, impartiality, a quota on original production and limitations controlling advertiser power over the schedule and programming (Wheeler, 1997:90).

Television had thus been organised into a dual service with cultural edicts preserved by the BBC together with an ITV system that depended upon economic considerations for its existence, without competing for the same source of finance. The question for the BBC was whether it could carry out its core functions in a new media form with which it had been uncomfortable, and under direct competition for the first time in its history. Furthermore, it raised a number of serious issues that had to be addressed immediately such as justifying the licence fee through securing a sizeable audience share. Curran and Seaton (1991:196) label this a fundamental threat because it opened up the BBC to a form of inspection whereby the reality of its collapse had to be contemplated. If its output could not secure audiences then the Corporation would not merit the licence fee, forcing it into emulating the commercial programmes. Moreover, the backing of big business endowed ITV with almost three times as much money to spend on content (Paulu, 1961:22).

The BBC's vulnerability was a persistent theme through the remainder of the decade. Tunstall (1983:39) clarifies how ITV did encounter initial difficulties but by 1957 had resolved its teething problems and was beginning to make substantial profits. ITV's lighter content proved to be much more popular with audiences as quiz shows, American imports and variety performances featured prominently in its schedule and attracted the majority of viewers. Burton (2000:272) points out such tactics worked to the extent that by 1957 it had gained 73% audience share. Curran and Seaton (1991:199) argue that its reliance on showmen, rather than the predominantly Oxbridge educated BBC personnel, assisted ITV in its orientation towards more popular forms of culture. The commitment to entertainment was therefore much stronger and necessary in helping the new broadcaster in its drive to secure sufficient advertising revenue.

The innovations in programming were not confined to entertainment alone as the new channel pioneered fresh initiatives in regards to news and current affairs. Sendall (1982:351) remarks how ITV was responsible for in-depth forms of political output, a genre which it greatly expanded with more detailed styles of reporting and issues of interest that the BBC had ignored. This illuminated ITV's ability to capture and hold onto audiences in both fictional and factual programming, along with the

sense of daring it exhibited in trying out fresh ideas to increase the scope of the medium. Also, the restrictive confines of the BBC led to a large exodus of its staff for the more adventurous climate of ITV, which offered a more receptive environment for creative endeavour as well as higher wages (Burns, 1977:51).

The decade ended with the substantive elements of the broadcasting ecology having been totally reconstituted to greatly enlarge the citizen's connection with the wider world. Television had quickly gained ground to become a serious medium whilst its organisation into a dual system injected a completely new broadcasting philosophy of commercialism. The entire mood of television as an industry had been changed by ITV and these shifts pervaded the whole field with a new institution, a different set of purposes and novel form of finance, all of which were beginning to push the BBC towards some form of change. Significantly, an economic dimension had been introduced into broadcasting to signify further priorities and a new type of relationship with the audience (Paulu, 1961:22). The ruptures ITV caused dispelled the notion that television was a craze of ephemeral interest as a sole adjunct to radio and instead forcefully conveyed it was a crucial domestic instrument with far reaching social, economic, political and cultural implications. Audience figures confirm this, with viewing having exceeded listening by 1955 and an astonishing nine million television licences in operation by 1958 (Crisell, 1997:76). From here the medium was on the edge of something much bigger when it would branch out and extend its scope further still.

The 'Golden Age' of Television

The manner in which television had quickly entrenched its position, and the change in spirit brought about by a commercial broadcaster, were thought to necessitate some kind of formal review to assess the full significance of these dramatic shifts. Such issues formed the rationale behind the Pilkington Enquiry into broadcasting in 1960, where these fundamental questions were to be addressed and television's ongoing direction would be defined. Negrine (1998a:25) spells out that the Committee's remit was to evaluate the performance of the broadcasting system up until that point and relatedly, to consider how the changes could be structured for the

benefit of society as a whole. Burns (1977:34) elucidates how the report attributed immense power to television in terms of influencing the values and moral standards of society because of its pervasiveness. By doing so, the Pilkington Committee adopted a Reithian approach in assessing television's performance, a stance which informed its overall thrust. This thinking was manifest in the report's chief findings which praised the BBC for enlightening the public by raising educational standards and moral awareness, while levelling serious criticism at ITV for its populist programmes that aimed at the lowest common denominator (Wheeler, 1997:91).

On these grounds the BBC was awarded another channel, BBC 2, in 1963 with the specific remit of prioritising minority interests not catered for by the mainstream. Stricter stipulations on serious programming were placed on the commercial sector as the final report made no concessions on the need for ITV to improve its service by moving away from popular fare. Tunstall (1983:92) calls the committee's stance a ferocious denunciation of commercial television and explains that it led to the regulator forcing the companies into putting on more serious programming from this point. Thus, the Pilkington Enquiry reiterated the principles of public service as the overarching framework for television in Britain for the reason that they would direct the system towards the Reithian triumvirate to inform, educate and entertain. Burton (2000:289) argues that a vociferous body of opinion expressed by sections of the press and amongst MP's found the report to be snobbish in tone because it invoked an elitist definition of quality that ran counter to the growing liberal mood of the time. Nevertheless, its main recommendations were passed into law.

ITV did rework its schedule to satisfy the increased public service obligations that had been placed on it to repel charges of vulgarity and cultural illiteracy. Potter (1989:82) documents the channel's enduring commitment to more serious programming and their placement at peak times in the aftermath of Pilkington. Correspondingly, the 1960's signalled a massive transformation in the approach of the BBC towards the audience. Under the new Director-General Hugh Greene, programme policy shifted in order to increase its audience share so that it could fully account for its public funding. Briggs (1995:350) clarifies how the injection of a populist current into the schedule meant that musical shows, situation comedies, light

entertainment and drama all populated the BBC's output in a manner they had never previously been able to.

Several writers emphasise the importance of this measure. Ellis (2002:56) claims how "it is clear that public service broadcasting only found its public when commercial television began to steal it away". Wheeler (1997:95) observes that this was a crucial adaptation of Reithianism designed to fuse a more intimate connection with the audience. Seymour-Ure (1996:64) stresses the individual contribution of Greene when arguing that the new Director-General had a more liberal interpretation of public service during a period of important change in social attitudes. By devising content that was more reflective of audience demand, the BBC had begun to commit itself to serving the viewers rather than simply imposing upon them.

From here the television system exhibited a convergence in content with the BBC and ITV moving from different positions to occupy a centralist mainstream that avoided charges of cultural debasement on one extreme and remote elitism on the other. Potter (1989:3) clarifies how the two organisations were less distinguishable in terms of their content because of the particular demands placed upon them. A mixture of popular fare and serious content dominated the listings, providing audiences with a range of choices and variety of programme types to illuminate how ITV had become a serious broadcaster and the BBC was interested in the needs of the audience. Wheeler (1997:95) sets out how this period became known as the 'cosy duopoly' as the nightly schedules were orchestrated to ensure a parity of viewers with the twinning of current affairs programmes in the same spot². This planning guaranteed serious content would be watched and not squeezed out by competitive tactics such as screening more popular shows at the same times. Meanwhile, audience share within this period of the mid 1960's to the late 1970's was generally equally split between the two sectors (Seymour-Ure, 1996:104). Thus, peaceful co-existence rather than fierce competition between the two broadcasters typified this phase and allowed both the BBC and ITV to command significantly high viewing figures.

² Other authors such as Jeremy Tunstall call this the 'Golden Age' of Television because of the insightful innovations in output that characterised the period (1983:41).

This compromise also stimulated the expansive spurt that got underway in the 1960's, when television's output unearthed a range of new genres that examined a plethora of issues previously untouched by the medium. Corner (1991:10) argues the changing cultural climate of the 1960's provided a refreshing impetus for the innovations in current affairs, drama and entertainment programmes of the time. It did so by highlighting how there was more subject matter to cover and numerous angles of inquiry available in the treatment of these issues. For Curran and Seaton (1991:229), television rapidly developed its own form which was quite different to the earlier styles of radio and film. With the flourishing array of output and emerging genres, television was in the process of acquiring a unique distinctiveness and cultural centrality as a medium of communication.

Ellis (2002:46) claims drama became more adventurous and explored sensitive areas such as housing problems and unemployment, before sparking national debates on those issues. Wyndham Goldie (1977:237) describes how there was a shift in tone amongst topical programmes, with a new brand of vivacity, wit and realism that courted controversy in the shows *That Was The Week That Was* and *Tonight*, along with in-depth reporting in the likes of *Panorama* and *World In Action*. Seymour-Ure (1996:189) confirms how the intrusion of television into politics gave rise to formal rules for the medium's conduct on certain topics and also led to the growing adaption of MP's styles and routines to the demands of the medium. Despite its heavily regulated nature, the emerging television system offered programme makers a creative freedom that allowed new ideas to thrive. All of this demonstrates how television developed novel forms of content in response to the legislative requirements contained within Pilkington, the need to justify public finance and the more liberal social mood of the time.

Significant technical advancements complemented the progression in output in this phase of television's evolution. The adoption of a new line standard of 625 improved the picture from that which had used 405 lines making it sharper and more suitable for colour transmissions (Lambert, 1982:15). Colour television was introduced in 1968 and enhanced the viewing experience by making content more 'real' and its impact more visceral. Briggs (1995:848) documents the stimulus this provided for the manufacturers of the sets, with eleven million colour licences issued

within the first ten years. Teletext was another important innovation and was indicative of how further functions were being conceived so that the television set could give viewers more services in addition to programming. Crisell (1997:205) outlines how teletext delivered to the television screen continuously up dated information in the form of print and graphics, enabling viewers to opt out of live output and use the set for information purposes at a time which suited them.

Videocassette recorders were developed in the 1970's and allowed television to be used for vastly different ends than broadcasters had intended because they brought pre-recorded material to viewers. Williams (1998:174) demonstrates how this was an important innovation as audiences now had an exciting opportunity to 'timeshift' where they could view content at their individual convenience by escaping the schedules. However, the hugely prohibitive cost of the hardware meant they did not take off until well into the next decade (Crisell, 1997:205).

With television so firmly embedded within the cultural fabric of the nation by the 1970's, regulatory attention focused on further maturing content to serve audiences with a more complete array of choices. Lambert (1982:19) explains that a fourth channel had been technically possible from the 1960's but the Labour Government of the time feared it would undermine the financial stability of commercial television. There were also several different opinions on the form such a channel should take, with certain interest groups keen to have an ITV 2, while others pushed for a service totally dedicated to Open University programmes (Blanchard, 1982:9). These matters were resolved when the Annan Enquiry into broadcasting published their report in 1977. Seymour-Ure (1996:108) states how the Committee decided that the new channel would be imbued with the responsibility of serving Britain's social and cultural minorities.

In this way the television system would have a broadcaster with the specific remit of appealing to those viewers who were not well represented by existing output such as ethnic sections of the population and other socially excluded groups that may have included for instance, the old, young and homosexuals. Lambert (1982:48) outlines how advocates such as Anthony Smith believed the new channel had to reflect the evolving structure of a society which was thought to be made up of an

increasingly compounded number of interest groups rather than mass class solidarities. Thus, a new alternative broadcaster was required to give a voice to the growing cultural heterogeneity of a plural society by prising open the confines of the duopoly and moving the notion of public service away from a centralised tract that sought to appeal to all. Negrine (1998a:31) confirms that the underlying drive of the Annan Report was to push for a form of State intervention in the structures of broadcasting based on some notion of the public good. It did so by emphasising the differences in society rather than an all-encapsulating common ground.

Channel Four was set up on unique lines in order to fulfil these aims in its status as a commercial entity with a particular strand of public service woven intimately into its constitution. It was to be a *publisher* not a producer of programmes in that it would commission content from other sources rather than creating it in house. This meant programme makers who did not fit into the patterns of viewing developed by the duopoly, and who had encountered huge difficulties in raising finance for their projects or finding buyers for what they made, now had an outlet (Curran and Seaton, 1991:230). Hood and Tabery-Peterssen (1997:34) stress that the aim was to give access to smaller firms within the industry and by extension, provide a platform for marginal voices in society. As the new broadcaster was required by law to commission a set figure of its output from independent producers, the propensity for remote views to be aired would increase. This was also intended to stimulate the independent sector by giving its producers a significant home market for the first time (Lambert, 1982:2).

The channel was given funded by a mixed budgetary system where it would receive a subsidy out of the public purse and finance raised through advertising. Caterall (1999:XVI) explains that the structural set up encouraged experimentation by the fact that there was no direct pressures to build an audience, since it was not Channel Four but the ITV companies who had to sell its advertising space. All of this illustrates that this channel was designed to emphasise the position of broadcasting as a social and cultural sphere within which niche audiences could be enfranchised (Blanchard, 1982:17). Its foundations revealed a substantial reworking of public service and approach towards the role of broadcasting in society. Caterall (1999:XVIII) feels the channel was successful in addressing audiences and groups not

catered for previously because it encouraged a trend towards more short-run commissioning for specialist audiences when it did air in 1982.

Goodwin argues that this early term in television's history rapidly cemented its status as a mass medium par excellence (1998:1). During this time frame it was guided by an accorded role observable in the few channels, the secure sources of funding, the free-to-air programming, the high degree of State regulation and the generalised nature of content conveyed to a mass audience. Thus, television functioned within the parameters of a cohesive equilibrium, which despite not being static, had a quite stable and controlled dynamic that revolved around public service. The persistent theme throughout this stage centred on expanding television in such a way that its services would be greatly enhanced whilst retaining a spirit of public service at the core. In 1974, more than seventeen million television licences were issued, indicating the widespread penetration the medium had swiftly achieved in its brief history (Briggs, 1995:1005).

Such ubiquity explains why Government and industry felt it necessary to add on more features to the household appliance that had come to occupy a permanent place in the homes and minds of Britain's citizens. It was also during this period that British television solidified its reputation as the best in the world for the rich array of content it served and the quality of broadcasting it exemplified (Potter, 1989:4). The system also received worldwide praise for the successful operation of a mixed economy approach of public service broadcasting and commercialism, within which a combined national and regional framework functioned (Goodwin, 1998:2). For Briggs (1995:XV), this phase encapsulates a vast panoply of attitudes, ideas and policies that drew from the deepening historical transformations in national and world affairs to advance a changing role and context for television. These structures though were to be reconfigured as the medium entered its next incarnation, when a series of factors would forcefully collide to instigate another stage in its evolution.

New Forms of Television

In 1979 Margaret Thatcher headed a new Conservative administration that quickly set itself the task of curing what it saw as a series of national afflictions that had peppered the 1970's. Correspondingly, it was felt Britain's position within the accelerating world economy would be advanced only after these domestic issues were resolved. Throughout the next decade she instituted a specific brand of restructuring that sought to apply the same market logic to all areas of civic life. Gamble (1994:4) describes how Thatcherism was a political project designed to revive market liberalism as the dominant public philosophy and to create the conditions for a dynamic economy by limiting the scope of the State while retaining its authority. In drawing upon Libertarian ideas on the primacy of individuals and the minimalist role of the State, Thatcher was intending to reorganise society in a way that situated consumers at the centre of activities.

Le Grand and New (1999:114) point out how this thinking of economic Liberalism emphasised rampant individualism as the prevailing social maxim. King (1998:279) confirms how this notion, loosely based on monetarist economic theory, was believed to work. The deregulation of business would release entrepreneurial initiatives which State restrictions and taxation stifled, thereby enfranchising the consumer with greater choice in an invigorated marketplace. Thus, a minimalist State aligned to free markets was thought to preserve the rights of individuals along with creating the conditions from which a much-needed dynamism could be injected into the so-called ailing economy.

The vigour with which Thatcher held on to these principles meant that this approach would be applied to as many social affairs as possible because it constituted an overall vision of how society should be organised. Television too needed to be revamped in such a way that a fully functioning competitive arena would be in place to maximise consumer choice and generate an economic surplus with broadcasting enterprises working efficiently as industrial entities. These measures would make broadcasting organisations more efficient, hardening them into elite companies ready to succeed in international competition (Collins, 1990:147). Hutchinson (1999:136)

stresses how the Prime Minister had developed an acute hostility to what she regarded as a cosseted, overmanned and uncompetitive industry in urgent need of radical change. She felt the BBC represented huge problems towards the realisation of a free market in broadcasting as a large and cumbersome organisation that did not respond to consumer demand.

This cohered with her thinking that maintaining a large public sector was unsustainable after the long-term decline of the economy (Gamble, 1994:20). Thatcher (1993:634) also wrote disparagingly about the values of Reithianism, berating its insistence on knowing what was best for individuals. With its weaknesses identified, there followed an ideological shift in the purposes of broadcasting with the Conservative Government aiming to redesign television along free market principles in order to modernise the medium and to move the system forward. Cable and satellite technology provided the distributional capacity with which to prise open the field of broadcasting (Thatcher, 1993:635). The Conservative Government invested great hope in these innovations to offer a multitude of opportunities to update television and enlarge its profile.

In 1981 Thatcher set up the Information and Technology Advisory Panel to explore the range of issues related to technological changes and communication (Negrine, 1998a:67). The confines of spectrum scarcity were in the process of being obliterated by the 'communications revolution' so the need for heavy regulation to decide what was available was no longer deemed necessary and could be replaced by the interaction of consumer wants and business initiatives. This panel did identify great potential in cable technology to create a 'wired nation' where a myriad of information goods and services could be delivered straight into the home via the television set (Collins, 1990:117). Such ideas chimed with the Prime Minister's to the extent that she set about implementing the policy measures that would change television with it diffusing additional services on a free market basis. The task for Government was to create a level playing field amongst competitors, structuring the system to function in the interests of viewers with several suppliers in direct competition with each other for audience share.

O'Malley (1994:13) explains that the Thatcherite viewpoint was grounded in the belief that the technology would have a clear impact on society because it acted with a self-directed purpose to generate 'momentum'. After establishing a free market, the Government felt it could then stand back and allow the technology to cause change by serving needs more effectively because of the way it was to be organised around responsiveness to consumer demand. New technology then worked its effects on the television system through the prism of industrial policy owing to Government desire to promote what was seen as a developing commercial sector (Goodwin, 1998:7). Purchasing power became the key means of exercising civic rights according to this position since that was the terms within which citizenship was conceived by the philosophy which informed it. Thus, the ability to pay was intended to determine the types of services different individuals could receive. Dahlgren (2000b:27) sums up how it advocated a society increasingly punctuated by cultural difference would find a means to reflect its diversity through consumer markets in all areas of activity more effectively than any other mechanism.

This Libertarian thinking found the controlled, heavily regulated system of television unacceptable and naturally enough, attacked it passionately in order to reorganise it around different values. Goodwin (1998:8) explains the structures of television had been moulded during the 'welfare consensus' of post-war society, a position that the Conservative Government fundamentally defined itself against. Outdated, inefficient and morally unjustifiable sums up the public service broadcasting system as the Conservative Party saw it and explains the priority they gave to its reform. The Committee on the Financing of the BBC, commonly known after the name of its chairman Alan Peacock, became the forum where these issues would be addressed and television's future would be debated. The report (Home Office, 1986) did advocate a 'consumer sovereignty' model within which 'light touch' regulation and new technology would convert broadcasting into an industry more like the publishing business with competition making available different products to targeted audiences (Sergant, 1999:48). The committee did stop short of some of the changes Thatcher wanted, such as advertising on the BBC, but it did recommend a piecemeal transition to the free market model the Government desired. The report relegated public service to the periphery of the system to be replaced by questions of

profit signalling how broadcasting was considered a commercial activity rather than one with social and cultural significance (Williams, 1998:180).

The economic tone of the committee's discussions produced a document which redefined matters of social and cultural policy in terms of commodity exchange and in doing so, represented a considerable break from other inquiries (O'Malley, 1994:97). ITV and Channel Four did not escape the Thatcherite reforms either as they too had a more financial rationale attached to them through the 1990 Broadcasting Act. The ITV franchises were to be awarded on an auctioned basis to the highest bidder so that a greater degree of commercialism would be introduced into the process (Goodwin, 1998:97). This meant programming policies would feature less in the decisions to award franchises because they were relegated behind the weight of the bid itself. The Government favoured such an idea as they thought it would bring market forces into the duopoly and generate more money for the Treasury (Hutchinson, 1999:131). All of this would take place under the auspices of a new hands-off regulator, the Independent Television Commission (ITC) that was formed to monitor the commercial sector (MacDonald, 1993:90). The Act also permitted the sponsorship of entertainment programmes on commercial channels despite fears that this would influence the nature of the content. Furthermore, by 1993 Channel Four was compelled to sell its own advertising so that it was in direct competition for finance with ITV, a move which was to make the new channel more dependent on securing ratings (Curran and Seaton, 2003:289).

Much of this activity through the 1980's was conducted in an increasingly worsening climate between politicians and broadcasters with a series of disputes over output that Thatcher felt reflected a lack of professional commitment to the 'public interest'. The Government accused the BBC of impartiality on critical issues such as the Falklands War and the portrayal of terrorism when they felt that patriotism was required (Hood and Tabery-Peterssen, 1997:62). Similarly, ITV's transmission of *Death On The Rock* angered the Government for the same reasons. The journalists hit back against some of the flak they received by going on strike in 1985 in protest at the unreasonable editorial interference on the part of the Government. The disputes between the governors and the management of the BBC culminated in the dismissal of the Director-General Alasdair Milne in 1987, given his marching orders after one

bitter quarrel too many with senior Government officials. It is these examples which highlighted how the Prime Minister believed the faults of broadcasting were rooted in both its structural and programming spheres. It follows that the deep-seated nature of the ills as defined by this administration necessitated the host of wide-ranging reforms that they instituted.

Moreover, the appointment of partisan personnel into positions of authority was a feature of the decade as the Government attempted to bring the BBC into line by having its own supporters within the Corporation. While there had been a number of partisan BBC governorships through the 1980's, the Conservative administration were to make careful selections to the senior management of the BBC after the clashes which had tarnished relations between them. The appointments of Marmaduke Hussey as Chairman of the BBC's Board of Governors in 1986 and Michael Checkland as Director-General in 1987 to replace Milne were attempts to tame the organisation from the inside, given that both these individuals had strong Conservative leanings. Goodwin (1998:127) feels this resulted in a deep and lasting change within the managerial culture of the BBC because the institution had been packed to become more sympathetic to Government thinking. Collectively, all of these factors constituted an extremely serious crisis for the Corporation with attacks on its integrity, its funding structures and even doubts over its actual justification for existence being levelled by a hostile Government.

Not only in Government did the need to change television arouse concern but in a much wider context with several voices involved in the debate. Commentators within academia and business added intellectual weight to the claims that new technologies would bring an impressive array of services to the consumer, jobs to the industry and wealth to the country (Veljanovski, 1989:17). Curran (2002:201) stresses that during the 1980's a formidable lobby emerged outside of Government that was also fundamentally opposed to public service broadcasting. These groups saw potential in the business dimension of television and clicked well with those in Government who espoused the same viewpoint.

O'Malley (1994:79) details how Thatcher echoed and amplified the views expressed by advertisers, pressure groups and the press which harmonised with her

own. This backing meant she had enough high profile support to instigate change and that the issue was framed in a particular way for public debate. This occurred at the same time as other Western countries were also injecting more commercial forces into their broadcasting systems. The national, protected, public service model of broadcasting in Western Europe was in the process of being replaced by a more relaxed form of regulation based on market principles (Blumler, 1992:16). The international nature of change was indicative of a movement towards a more global broadcasting system in which successful protagonists could spread out and occupy foreign markets with fewer limitations on their holdings. However, the broadcasting organisations in Britain felt these structural changes were pushing them towards a downward slide of the lowest common denominator programming over which they had little control (O'Malley, 1994:134).

The background to some of these shifts can be explained by the relationship forged between Margaret Thatcher and the Press magnate Rupert Murdoch. Both of them held similar views on the utility of free markets and whilst this bond was established during the 1970's, the 1980's were to provide opportunities for both of them to advance the interests of the other. King (1998:285) explains the significance of Murdoch and how he was able to establish a commanding foothold in British television as he became the beacon of Thatcherite thinking. The mutually supportive situation between Thatcher and Murdoch was furthered during the 1980's as he expanded his media interests through the easing of ownership restrictions while she received favourable coverage in his newspapers. The Murdoch's press regularly printed 'knocking copy' about the BBC and ITV, emphasising the need for television to change (Hutchinson, 1999:137). The close affinity fostered between them therefore drove some of the deregulatory measures because both had strong reasons for wanting this, while Thatcher had the necessary power to institute it.

The actual merger between the two satellite players Sky and BSB in 1990 was illegal, contravening rules in terms of the overall size and market dominance of the end result. It was however, not referred, instead endowing Murdoch with almost total control of the new broadcast services, paving the way for a new breed of international, multimedia conglomerates to enter British broadcasting (Hood and Tabery-Peterssen, 1997:71). Meanwhile, King (1998:285) argues Sky is emblematic of the Thatcherite

reforms and assisted in the creation of the type of society she desired because, paradoxically perhaps, it drew on the same notions of choice and freedom to legitimise itself. So, while viewer choice was the appeal upon which it was based, Sky's market power was garnered through a particularly monopolistic type of industrial behaviour. In doing so, this company dismissed the very basic assumptions that had lain at the heart of the broadcasting system, replacing them with consumerist ideas on the relationship between broadcasters and audiences. In sum, the collective ethos was being swept away by a notion of individual provision contingent upon choice and ability to pay.

During the 1990's with Thatcher ousted, official animosity to the television system did relent, although the need to change broadcasting remained a political and industrial concern, particularly as a new framework had by now been put in place. The BBC pre-empted governmental attempts to modernise it by embarking on a journey of reinvention somewhat of its own accord. The 'Birtist' revolution saw the organisation cost cutting on a huge scale to free up resources for creative purposes and bolster funds for programming. Curran (2002:203) explains how the BBC performed an organisational cartwheel through its internal market, outsourcing some programme production and laying off staff. These tactics were designed to streamline the institution by eradicating profligacy to make it more efficient. So, the management culture was reorganised along with the finances and journalism of the BBC to harmonise with the new enterprise culture the Government was seeking to impose (O'Malley, 1994:154).

The BBC also engaged in much more commercial activity from the early 1990's with a whole series of projects designed to raise its finance and spread the profile of the organisation. Currie and Siner (1999:83) detail how programming exports rose, as did selling videos and developing popular brands across other media like *Teletubbies*. While such activities had taken place for some time, during the 1990's they reached a greater intensity than previously, illuminating the extent to which the BBC had become a major international player. Commentators point out how justification for the licence fee is paradoxically threatened by such successes because it illuminates how effectively the BBC can perform in the marketplace (Sergant, 1999:55). This activity raises doubts over the need for public taxation to

finance the BBC as its own enterprise has successfully increased both its finances and its remit as an institution.

By the mid-1990's, television had significantly changed because of this concerted effort to overhaul its structures and institute a completely new type of medium consistent with a broader political project. Feintuck (1999:127) finds this remorseless hostility to public service broadcasting mirrored the assaults on other public institutions such as health and education, both of which were also transformed during this period. Television became symbolic of the shifts elsewhere, whereby the reliance on private endeavour was thought to attain the optimum effect out of technology, individuals and institutions. Change came about from what Goodwin (1998:3) documents as a confluence of forces that interacted with each other to transform the medium. Political, economic, social and cultural, and technological pressures all combined to cause deep and fundamental changes in television, as well as forcing broadcasting institutions to reconfigure their activities.

Negrine (1998a:38) explains how the 'ecology' of broadcasting changed during this period with new services planned, along with funding methods that were different from the past, forcing incumbents to adapt and reassess their futures. The nature of change has been typified by a complete shift in philosophy with the entire field of broadcasting having been totally reworked to signal different political priorities. The Government framed audience members as consumers above any other definition in tune with the commercial framework it was establishing. By doing so, the social element of broadcasting was neglected and any contribution the new technologies could have made to such objectives were missed. Another terrestrial broadcaster with a commercial remit, Channel 5, came on air in 1997 following guarantees that it would be the last such addition to network television. Its programming schedule exhibited a heavily reliance on imported soap opera, films and other such content that has been labelled as low quality by some critics. The issue it and other additions raise is how much more the advertising market can be split in order to accommodate the array of new channels (McQueen, 1998:21).

Despite this concerted effort to change television, the development of the new services proved to be quite sluggish with audiences initially as cost remained

prohibitive, explaining why the satellite players were forced into a merger. Cable too encountered problems in recouping investment, although its ability to offer telephone services gave it another means with which to secure custom. To counter these difficulties, the new channels began to secure the rights of key content such as major sports events and blockbuster films for which they would charge viewers either by subscription or directly via pay-per-view. By 1997, Murdoch's tactics had begun to impoverish the terrestrial system as he had the exclusive rights to televise a vast amount of premium content on his subscription services (Negrine, 1998a:82). He was able to do this because of his ability to pay for such programming and it is this which illustrates the type of market that had been created because it confirms how entry was totally contingent on existing capital, thereby closing off opportunities for all but the biggest media companies.

The steady migration of more and more popular programming to the satellite sector took with it increasing levels of terrestrial audiences. By 1996, 3.56 million British homes had satellite television while another 1.64 million had cable (Goodwin, 1998:53). Although this is a high rate of diffusion in a short period of time, it was hardly the revolution that had been envisaged and the severe financial problems of securing custom for the companies has continued, raising doubts over the long-term viability of such ventures. This point is emphasised by Wedell and Luckham (2001:23) who point out that a decade after the launch of the new services, terrestrial channels still attracted about 85% of the total audience, indicative of a far more partial and gradual transition in television itself than that which was intended by the philosophy which shaped it. Similarly, Goodwin (1998:156) explains that despite there being more than 50 nationally available cable and satellite channels in 1997, both ITV and BBC 1 still commanded the largest audiences by far with each having around 30% of the total audience on average in that year.

Overall, in less than twenty years the broadcasting system in Britain had been moved into new directions and pushed towards different objectives. Franklin (2001:50) outlines how Thatcher's analysis and perception of the problems confronting broadcasting helped to change the policy agenda for a decade. She was able to structure television in a radically different way because of the depth of the ideas she had for it and the inherent weaknesses she believed were embedded within

the system. This view came out of different ideas of what television should be and its overall centrality towards hastening the birth of an information society within which Britain would be a world leader (Collins, 1990:148). The importance of the cable and satellite technologies therefore lay in the way the political regime diffused them to cohere with the objectives they had concerning the medium's role and explains the energetic drive to 'modernise' it. More entrants, an international incursion of new broadcasters, a looser regulatory framework, different technological means and novel funding methods such as sponsorship, subscription and pay-per-view show a television system quite different from that of 1979. However, the 'free market' that had been envisaged and planned for had not been realised largely because of the peculiar behaviour of broadcasting as a non-traditional market. The nature of the transformation is therefore best summed up by O'Malley (1994:177) when he observes how the framework of broadcasting was redrawn around the interests of capitalist accumulation, as commodity relations were pushed into the heart of the public broadcasting system to force change with an intensity and sense of purpose that superseded other moments in its history.

Overview

This broad historical sketch demonstrates how television has evolved from humble beginnings to becoming an accepted part of everyday life and has highlighted the distinct cycles within this transition. The chapter has mapped out a chronological narrative to uncover the institutions and processes that have influenced its shape, along with the key themes in this transformation, revealing how they have been dealt with over time. History shows the patterns of development that have moulded the contours of the television system, along with the continuities and breaks in this period. Hartley (1999:78) argues "television embarked on a career of historical development which had no foregone conclusion, no obvious direction and no pre-ordained form". Over time, it has acquired direction and a form through debate and inquiry, and this chapter has exposed how these have taken effect.

Negrine (1994:99) points out that broadcasting history exhibits a central theme of constant change. This chapter has detailed where change to the medium has come

from, how it has happened and what it has achieved. Television's history has not been a seamless continuity of progression, but rather a series of quantum leaps where it has moved from one set of ideas concerning its purpose and a framework that seeks to implement such aims, to other value systems, aided by technological innovation and political guidance³. It also shows how television has crossed into other spheres of activity, moving away from a specific cultural remit to attain political and economic duties over time. This method illuminates the manner in which television's constitution has been ideologically recast to signify different political priorities in its various incarnations.

Clearly, the role of the State has been central in the story of television. Seymour-Ure (1996:59) explains how broadcasting has been seen as a legitimate field of public policy as its development has been shaped by periodic Government inquiries that have concerned the management of expansion. This demonstrates the acceptance with which the technology has been held, given that the State quickly took charge of it and has continuously paid careful attention to organising it. The need to mould television in particular directions that are deemed to extract its full potential whilst averting the dangers it may pose displays the power it is believed to have. While the State has retained a high degree of control over the medium, another crucial issue is organisation, when the authorities have attempted to establish its scope in order to meet desired objectives.

Smith (1973:22) argues the story of broadcasting can be read as a story of the interactions of a series of inventions with a series of beliefs about the nature of society. Smith's position is that the decisions concerning organisation reveal the prevailing ideas of how a society works or how it ought to work. This idea holds true for the whole of the medium's history, showing a remarkable prescience for some of the changes that happened under Thatcher. It is these beliefs, from the need to improve audiences to the desire to serve their constructed social needs, and the aim of supplying their rational interests that illuminates broadcasting's changing purpose by becoming enmeshed within the framework of operation. The persistent themes of media influence, public service, cultural illiteracy, and Americanisation recur

³ I am indebted to Professor Kevin Williams for this idea.

throughout the entire course of the medium's life cycle. The difference is to be found in the way they are thought to operate at various periods and the role of the medium in relation to them that has found its way into broadcasting legislation repeatedly.

The other crucial point that stands out from this chapter is the manner in which television has grown in a comparatively short period of time. Burton (2000:265-267) explains how it has enlarged in scope across several dimensions through its history. He points out that geographically it has expanded from a service based around London to a full national service. Institutionally, television has grown from the BBC's monopoly to a multiplicity of providers. Its airtime meanwhile has increased from evenings only to round the clock, twenty-four hour coverage. Television technology has been updated and improved as there is no longer a unitary means of processing broadcasting signals with the rival delivery systems of cable and satellite complementing the analogue service. The means of distribution has itself then become a point of contestation with rival broadcasters attempting to establish their system as the standard operating platform. Television content also reveals an exploration of form as programming has found alternative methods with which to engage audiences through the development of new styles, genres and subject-matter.

Finally, the model of broadcasting has changed from one based totally on public service to a commercial system where the former features in a less central way. The key theme Burton identifies therefore is expansion. Its remit has increased over time, reflecting the cultural centrality and success of the medium in reaching audiences. At the same time, this enlargement comes at a heavy price. Newby (1997:6) explains how broadcasters now have far more priorities pushed upon them than the Reithian objectives of its initial phase. They have to fill airtime on a limited budget; provide programmes which please both audiences and advertisers; ensure the channel gets regular publicity in the tabloid press; and provide a reasonable return to shareholders. The manner in which these are resolved has a huge bearing on the way in which individual channels, and the medium as a whole, will develop.

When considering why television has assumed the shape it has and how change has occurred, it becomes apparent that these are the result of a complex interplay of different factors. Miller (2003:19) argues that "television's history is not a

tale of a consumer driven market but an uncertain dance of law, the State, monopoly capital, labour performance and interpretations that reveal complex, shifting power relations". This reveals the multitude of factors involved and the uncertainty over the eventual shape of the medium. It becomes clear how the manner in which they coalesce produces change. It also stresses the role of the audience as secondary to that of the State which decides the purpose, and broadcasters who implement these aims. Wheeler (1997:107) finds a dialectic between the public and broadcasters, along with a compact between the State and broadcasting institutions, has defined the growth of the technology rather than social need. It is apparent how certain frameworks of operation have been established and once fixed, lay down the parameters within which future developments will take place. The history of television can thus be seen as a form of technological advancement and philosophical reconfiguration in that the medium has been developed to offer services it previously did not, formulated through questions of organisation and regulation that reveal different conceptions of broadcasting's role. For these reasons, the history of television is best explained not by 'internal factors' such as the invention of television technology, but by 'external factors' which have determined what impact the technology would have and what people would think about it (Hartley, 1999:78).

The conceptions of audience have changed to reveal various definitions of social need for which the purposes of broadcasting should be structured towards. An economist might classify the history as the shift towards a fully functioning model of perfect competition that seeks to champion the viewer. This has been achieved by moving the system away from the extreme of monopoly, through an oligopolist phase to the present situation which could be regarded as the attempt to inaugurate a fully functioning competitive market. Murdock (1992:19) however, finds this shift is indicative of a redefinition of citizenship, where the construction of audience as consumers reveals a different logic at the heart of broadcasting. He finds a change in the overall broadcasting mindset concerning the manner in which audiences are addressed, one in which they are bereft of civic rights. This eventuality has arisen out of the rejection of commercialism as a negative force.

However, the multichannel environment of today is a television system in which several layers of service are provided, from the basic terrestrial provision to a

gamut of programming and services associated with satellite and cable. There exists very different values in each of these sectors with the BBC still committed to public service and Sky offering a service based far more on commercial criteria. King (1998:288) describes how anyone tuning into Sky television enters into a different set of relationships because of the individualistic ideas and aims this company draws upon and has built into its unique financial arrangements. Television is therefore no longer a unitary site where a single definition can adequately explain the complexities of its relationships because of the separate layers contained within it, each of which has their own connections with audiences. Television is therefore a mixed 'ecosystem' in the words of Purnell (2001:78) with a variety of species that reflect the balanced ecology of British broadcasting. Technology then is important because it enables audiences to engage with television in several ways, and is reflective of different priorities and values that separate the various broadcasting organisations.

This chapter has detailed how television has evolved into the medium it is and the ideas, forces and institutions that have driven it there. By highlighting the major themes and actors in the development of the medium it has brought the story of television up to date and signposted where scholarly attention must be paid in order to understand how change occurs. In doing so, it has set out a formula and context from which to delineate the progression of digital television by providing the backdrop from which the next series of changes is taking place. Goodwin (1998:173) concurs his exploration of the subject by arguing how history poses crucial questions about the future development of UK television. A historical template therefore offers a conceptual base from which subsequent shifts can be gauged to locate the nature and extent of change, whilst also paying attention to issues of organisation, expansion, funding and the role of audiences. I shall now consider digital television, the next phase in the medium's development.

Chapter 4: Technology – Weightless Bits

This chapter examines exactly what digital television entails by observing key characteristics of digital technology and pinpointing how they impact upon the medium to generate an array of new functions and issues distinct from its analogue phase. The ministers responsible for implementing the framework for the evolving communications landscape, Tessa Jowell of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, and Patricia Hewitt of the Department of Trade and Industry, strongly advance that digital technology represents a fundamental development that is changing the way people think about every aspect of the medium, from its industrial context to eventually culminate in progressions in the wider social order (DCMS/DTI, 2001). Industry insider Alan Griffiths (2003:1) too feels digitalisation has profound implications for television in terms of how it is viewed and how it works as a business because of its ability to rework existing models. In this light the chapter proceeds by exposing the contrasts with analogue, making it possible to explore the full significance of this change to television's role as a means of communication. Such an approach should illuminate distinctive features of the emerging broadcasting ecology and the series of issues which accompany them to detect the underlying nature of this quantum leap in the medium's development.

Digitalisation is the conversion of data such as words, numbers, sounds, music and images into electronic binary digits represented by a common code of 0's and 1's. In a digital system there are only two states for processing and storing data – on (1) or off (0) with no in-between (Feldman, 1997:2). This signifies how digital information is broken down and relayed as a series of numerical values that are assigned to represent and decode data, recognisable technically as the binary language it forms. Analogue information, on the other hand, is continuous in that there are no gaps, but instead a steady flow of variations in the signal transmitted whereby its physical

quantity is relayed in full proportion. Hesmondhalgh (2002:199) explains that analogue works by representing every possible value of the item being conveyed through radio waves that are analogous to the original act of communication because they correspond to it exactly. The transmitted message is thus delivered as a continuous stream of information.

The importance of the change is highlighted by Lister et al (2003:16) who point out how digital media texts are 'dematerialised' in the sense they are separated from their physical form and shifted into a symbolic computational realm. While analogue transmissions require vast amounts of bandwidth because of the way in which the message corresponds with the original source, digital uses only a notational value. Thus, digital media reconstitute the physical signal to artefact so that the actual properties of the message are not converted as variations in waves but into numbers (Lister et al, 2003:15). In other words, although digital cannot represent the physical quantity of the message in the same way as analogue, the binary method it employs does equate to a speed in processing, less susceptibility to distortion, the ability to rectify errors quickly and compatibility with computing technology (Lax, 1997:52).

Within this symbolic domain several features of computing are adopted by other media forms to usher in a different type of information character and flow from that of the traditional analogue media industries. In fact, digital technology was originally the infrastructure of computing but has now spread to comprise the backbone of other media sectors including television, a shift that initiates a common technological underpinning to the entire communications system. This is reflective of the process of convergence, a term that has become one of the buzzwords of the contemporary era and features prominently in discussions about the future.

Negroponte (1995:12) argues that a digital communication system involves the high-speed circulation of electronic data (represented by 0's and 1's) and it is these 'weightless bits' of information which characterise a tumultuous shift in the modern world. He outlines how the technical aspects of the emerging communications environment brings with it a plethora of beneficial social and industrial consequences, indicative of the progressive nature of the technology. Digital is proclaimed as a huge and fundamental break in the modern world, one which denotes an epochal moment in

human history because of its inherent logic, technological superiority over analogue and subsequent impact upon communication processes. On a similar note, Government discourses continually assert how digital advancements in communications are immensely positive, generating a new and different type of social environment that fosters an information flow which will ultimately create a more inclusive economic and democratic landscape (DCMS/DTI, 2000:7).

Government plans are structured around a concerted effort to create an information society in which electronic communications assume a primacy towards several aspects of everyday existence¹. Digital technology is central to the aim of building an electronically centred nation, acquiring a political and societal significance for its perceived impact on daily life. Lax (1997:51) outlines its resonance by arguing that digital is not simply a technical description because it assumes a cultural significance with a host of implications for society. The idea is that the modern world is increasingly affected and defined by the proliferation in information brought about by the digital revolution. There is thus a huge expectancy regarding the role and importance of the emerging communications system that has greeted its formation, with television becoming a focal point for wider claims concerning the substantive power of digital technology.

On a more cautious note, Murdock (2000b:36) feels that the simple shift to digital will have profound consequences for every aspect of communications, from the structure of the media industries to the routines and textures of everyday experience. Whilst not espousing such a positive view as other commentators, Murdock's point is that digital technology transforms the communications landscape and compels broadcasters to alter their activities, both of which have serious consequences for the television service audiences receive and how they engage with these offerings. The reasons behind his prognosis are to be found in the unique properties of digital technology aligned to the industrial shifts that accompany its implementation. Distinct corporate configurations are taking root as media firms diversify their interests across the whole communications sector and seek alliances to gain a commanding foothold in the digital future. Such imperatives have led to more

¹ This topic is pursued fully in Chapter Six.

entrants into broadcasting like the satellite and cable operators and may soon include the telecommunications company British Telecom who could offer another route on which to deliver television services. These changes have resulted in existing players reassessing their business activities in response to the increased competition of the radically different market conditions that accompany a digital media system.

In this light Levy (1999:4) feels broadcasting markets are correspondingly in a major state of flux not only because of technological change, but also because of the industrial and regulatory issues this engenders, resulting in a gamut of important themes to grasp for those involved in television. The extent to which the nuances of digitalisation are understood will determine the success of companies who harbour ambitions in the television industry and more widely in the new environment. The task is to make sense of these patterns in order to comprehend the exact contours of the emerging communication system before explaining their significance to the methods of communicating information.

Convergence

The chief characteristic of digital that encourages seismic shifts is the technological convergence between computing, broadcasting and telecommunications (Feldman, 1997:3). The analogue age was typified by discreet industries, each separated by their own particular technologies of production and distribution, together with a distinct mode of consumption unique to each. For instance, broadcasters produced programmes, distributed them over the airwaves to be received on either (but generally not both) radio or television sets. The specificity of activity resulted in media institutions being contained within a single industrial context with very little crossover into other sectors. Each area of the communications industry was subject to its own regulatory mechanisms as the sectors co-existed in isolation, exemplified by their own companies and operating rules. Those involved in broadcasting therefore concentrated their efforts almost exclusively on that field of activity, indicative of the disparate nature of the analogue era. The digital world is vastly different, as it is characterised by a fusion of technologies, companies and media forms into a

multimedia collective that stretches the parameters of activity across the entire communications field.

Lister et al (2003:385) define convergence as “the ways in which previously discreet media forms and processes are drawn together and combined through digital technologies. This occurs both at the levels of production and distribution”. That is, content for newspapers, music, radio and television programmes can now be produced using the same networked multimedia computer as opposed to having different physical production bases that correspond with each (ibid.). In terms of distribution, television programmes can now be streamed across the worldwide web, while tentative steps at relaying audio-visual material on mobile phones are underway. Press organisations have a cyber presence with online versions of their daily editions and limited Internet access is possible on mobile phone handsets. The reasons for this ability to spread into previously different media sectors can be attributed to the technological properties of a digital network.

Doyle (2002:142) points out how storing, reproducing and transmitting information in binary form means that information of any kind, once reduced to digits, can be manipulated and repackaged for dissemination in another guise. All media content can now be configured as digital data regardless of its origins with the consequence that some of the innovatory capabilities of computing are applicable to other media forms. It is eminently possible therefore to endlessly edit, copy, store, retrieve and redesign digital information as well as merging it with other information to enable it to reappear in a multiplicity of formats (Graham and Davies, 1997:12).

The consequence of a whole scale shift to a digital system of communication is that the mode of delivery or industrial origin of output need not define its transmission mode or the outlet at which it is received. Briggs and Burke (2002:269) explain that convergence and its method of digital distribution allows content to be received on any compatible item of hardware. For instance, accessing music files over the Internet indicates how content is not confined to its original mode of reception, enabling audiences to consume it in a way that its producers may not have originally intended. Indeed, digital technology makes it possible to interchangeably use media content across different distribution platforms, increasing the means by which it can

be received. Web-TV, for example, illuminates how broadcasters have more avenues to simulcast their wares but that they must also consider how these alternatives might modify the economics of their core business. Television is thus a field of activity now open to firms with major interests in other sectors, adding significantly to the number and character of players on the broadcasting scene. Government rhetoric (DCMS/DTI, 1998:17) advances that convergence offers fresh commercial opportunities to media firms by opening up the formerly closed broadcasting industry to outsiders, a move which could also increase the competitiveness of the whole sector.

Moreover, in digital format, information benefits from certain advantages analogue is unable to offer as the capabilities of computing are exported to other media. Hesmondhalgh (2002:199) highlights an important quality digital technology bestows in that it makes different media potentially connectable with each other to facilitate the interdependence between them. Television for instance, will have an 'interactive' component, the significance of which will be documented later, a feature which indicates the manner in which digital technology allows for 'two-way' communication. In a digital system data can be moved around, shared and accessed via different means, resulting in compatibility between communication sectors (McQueen, 1998:219). The case of on-line newspapers reveals more sophisticated searches through cross-tabulation of available databases are possible, offering far greater possibilities in terms of data retrieval than the hard copy version. An extreme example is provided by Hall (2001:20) who explains the idea of the 'Daily Me' enables users to create their own version of a newspaper from composite parts of various editions. The end result, one which matches each user's interests exactly, would be unique as it is constructed through the manipulation of content by combining separate aspects to suit that reader alone.

With a common technological underpinning to the media system, Levy (1999:5) observes a convergence of content, delivery channels and equipment. Digitalisation has engendered a blending together of items of consumer hardware to carry out multiple tasks, as opposed to the analogue method of housing certain functions in specific equipment. The Internet for example acts as the gateway to ancillary radio, magazine and film services amongst many others, obviating the need to have separate items for each. The coming together of media sectors also implies

that communication is to be defined by content alone as the production base, distribution method and device on which it is accessed need not vary. Thus, the information disseminated by a media sector is no longer unique to it and can be received in a variety of ways. The sectoral overlapping of convergence should benefit consumers who in time could gain from a single, fully integrated grand information hub that includes all of the functions of broadcasting, telephony and computing (Oliver, 2000:56). Convergence also has the potential to lead to the genesis of innovative content services through sectoral cross-overs by synthesising distinct functions to form something new. For instance, the Internet can add considerably to the experience of watching programmes, as will be outlined later in this chapter, because it allows television to develop facilities that go over and beyond the provision of programming (Stewart, 1999:232).

A fully convergent information device is attainable through the formation of open communication platforms that are able to receive any type of digital information, enabling them to provide the services of all the various types of media. Feldman (1997:70) details how the possibilities of convergence generates a vision of a large-scale information linkage via a unified infrastructure of fast, interactive networks to offer users multiple media services. Hardware of this kind needs to be developed on broadband (as opposed to ordinary 'narrowband') networks that have enough capacity to carry all of the information services that such a device could serve. The copper wires of the analogue era have insufficient capacity to carry both voice telephony and moving images owing to the vast amounts of space they occupy (Murdock, 2000b:37). There is thus an urgency to replace the old infrastructure with high capacity optical fibre cables or digital subscriber line cables (DSL) that can relay a far greater volume of information.

Broadband connections allow data to be shipped to consumers quickly and can operate on an 'always on' basis, aiding significantly the convenience of consumers (Stelzer, 2001:40). The layout of a national technological infrastructure to serve audiences with high-speed networks that have plentiful capacity is a necessary step in developing the potential of digital technologies. The Government believes it is of critical importance for itself and private enterprise to engage in an effective rolling out

of broadband technology in order to accelerate the benefits that they envisage are associated with convergence because of the commercial opportunities it affords.

Moreover, Levy (1999:6) sums up how convergence could change the structure of the communications market, as content is no longer defined by the method of delivery, a factor which undermines the specificity of sectors. The functions of different media are therefore not confined to the form in which they were originally contained as sectoral separations become blurred in a unified system (Graham and Davies, 1997:13). Convergence, as Owen (1999:16) details, implies a fundamental competitive struggle for survival amongst media, where the ability to reposition a company determines how effectively it can fit into a shifting communications terrain that is totally different in character to that which preceded it. A media industry that exhibits a greater series of connections is illustrative of the emerging 'Weightless Economy' that digital technologies are thought to induce, in which information can more freely circulate with the gradual erosion of boundaries between different media (Collins, 2002b:3).

Several commentators detail how there is a concomitant convergence in corporate ownership as companies seek to exploit the potential of enlarging their business across a common technological frontier (Murdock, 2000b:38; Curran and Seaton, 2003:288; Hood and Tabery-Peterssen, 1997:94). Importantly, technological convergence has the effect of enabling bigger commercial entities to be created as new markets open up to permit the diversification of interests from an enlarged audience mass. Companies can target untapped market segments that were formerly the preserve of organisations in other sectors. In order to flourish, media organisations must understand their business in a wider context and be able to exploit content across different platforms and channels of delivery (Feldman, 1997:13). Broadcasters are compelled to devise strategies that allow their content to be utilised in a variety of styles and across platforms in order to maximise revenues. Convergence also highlights how companies must consider their activities in a new light and that the possibility of expansion must be balanced against the threat of other players who could undermine their core business. So, while broadcasters have the opportunity to infiltrate other markets they must be aware that telecommunications operators, Internet businesses and computer firms can enter the television sector.

Given that companies can have multiple interests across former industrial boundaries, they are forging 'synergies' between old and new media activities in their attempts to exploit content (Leadbeater, 2000:112). The BBCi venture is a case in point as the Corporation has produced a hugely successful website that can make extensive use of its vast archive of programming. The diversification of interests liberates companies from their traditional areas of activity to secure numerous routes to a wider audience base, a move which potentially opens up several revenue streams. The British Government is encouraging technological convergence because it enables domestic firms to considerably increase their size through gaining economies of scale and scope (DCMS/DTI, 1998:11). This thinking holds that larger media organisations permit British industry to compete more effectively in the international trading sphere with the conglomerates of North America and mainland Europe because they would be of an equal size. Convergence is thus both a possibility and an aim for the digital world because it marks a decisive shift in how users can interact with media forms, as well as generating distinct types of information services through cross-over, and potentially creating bigger firms that are thought to buttress industrial performance.

Hesmondhalgh (2002:132) details how convergence has become a key policy objective, and in doing so, accelerates its own likelihood through initiatives designed to bring it about. Its requirement creates other policy measures, such as rolling out broadband technology and switching off the analogue frequencies, both of which are indicative of the manner in which convergence can develop the economic potential of the media. These imperatives have had a massive impact on the make-up and dynamic of the communications industry because they impose a high degree of change in regards to how firms operate. Tunstall (2004:261-273) details the pace of fluctuations in the technology, ownership and structure of the media industry in Britain. He illuminates the intensity and rapid nature of change, pinpointing how what was a stable market subject to incremental and gradual shifts is now characterised by widespread and fundamental realignment within short periods of time. We are perhaps witnessing a new wave of communicative possibilities along with the creation of an all encompassing communications industry that is characterised by common modes of production together with multiple means of diffusion and several points of reception.

It is sometimes advanced that certain safeguards need to be implemented so that possible negative by-products of a transforming industrial landscape are averted. Cross-media ownership becomes a pertinent topic in this instance owing to the probable danger of allowing a few dominant players to spread their influence over the whole communications terrain, an eventuality that seriously undermines the overall diversity of the opinions espoused (Shoosan and Cave, 2000:76). The question of which industrial actors are able to enter the television market and the roles they occupy is subject to overall regulatory approval even though convergence does make it possible for companies that have never previously been involved to develop broadcasting operations. Indeed, another dimension of convergence is the need to revamp the existing system of communications regulation to reflect and deal with the particularities of new technological and industrial conditions (Oliver, 2000:63)². It is, however, abundantly clear that broadcasting as a business is becoming an arena in which diverse types of communications firms can now enter who may have different priorities from the incumbents.

Viewing television on the Internet or mobile telephones also symbolises a shift in the cultural space programming occupies, indicative of how there are further opportunities for audiences to engage with content. The typical PC setting of the office augmented by communications on the move reflect that not only is the content of television migrating to other devices, but that it can populate the cultural routines associated with these different products. This is illustrative of what Lister et al (2003:13) call a 'dislocation' of media in that the properties of digitalisation enable television to inhabit other areas of daily life and physical spaces in addition to its traditional domestic setting. Such extensions also permit programming to be accessed from outside of its traditionally national confines owing to the international dimensions of the worldwide web. For Graham (2002:70), the qualities of digital technology that grant individuals the opportunity to consume television on numerous devices and in different ways has the consequence of augmenting a more demanding type of consumer who can be far more discerning in their choices. The idea is that individuals can be more proactive in their consumption of media products because of

² I explore this issue in Chapter Six.

the immense range of options on offer and the increased levels of user input such technologies require.

Hood and Tabery-Pettersen (1997:93) outline how some foresee the end of television because of the imminent collision of media forms. This scenario projects how television could be superseded by a hardware device which performs its functions along with those of the telephone and the computer amalgamated into one. Writers such as Negroponte (1995:48) feel television as is commonly understood will cease to exist and that its replacement will be an altogether more complex and dense information system, emerging as a sort of hybrid with the personal computer. Hesmondhalgh (2002:223) reasons that digital television, rather than the PC, is likely to emerge as the major converged media platform/distribution form in the near term because of its established centrality in people's lives. Despite the recent proliferation in media forms, he explains that television consumption has maintained its high levels as it continues to be a primary cultural activity for the vast majority. Given that television has embedded itself physically and culturally within the routines of the home it has a position that the PC has not yet acquired, making it more probable that it will be the unit upon which further innovations take place. This suggests that an entirely unique paradigm is being set to what we have previously understood to be television because the medium's immediate future takes direction from the wider seismic shifts in the communications landscape.

Despite the profound nature of change, it is as yet inordinately premature to envisage the 'end of television' as an immediate consequence of convergence. Miller (2003:12) argues that television's displacement is unlikely because such a scenario is heavily dependent on a massive increase in web penetration, an end that necessitates opening up access to the poorer sections of societies where Internet consumption lags massively behind television. Crisell (1997:260) meanwhile, explains how the work orientated nature of the PC may ensure a long-term division from the entertainment based focus of television, with audiences demarcating their usage of the two media in accordance with the separate functions each serves. Moreover, a seamless integration into a single hardware device would involve an overhaul to the existing cultural habits of an audience that television has secured in its history. Expecting individuals to learn how to fuse their usage of both media seems far-fetched, at least for the foreseeable

future, given that television has a familiarity that is as yet beyond the more junior Internet. What seems more likely is McQueen's (1998:219) idea that in the near term the different technologies will co-exist as singular entities, yet share content, software and infrastructure. These reasons suggest full convergence is a projection of technological possibility rather than one of immediate cultural reality³.

The uncertainties associated with technological change prompt Wedell and Luckham (2001:27) to insist that convergence remains an area overshadowed by more questions than answers owing to the complexities associated with a rapidly developing communications market that marks a radical departure from that which preceded it. While it is unclear how some of these issues will pan out, it is nevertheless certain that television is undergoing a metamorphosis with digital as its next incarnation. I take the stance, like Miller (2003:12), that it is more viable to regard television in a course of mutation whose end result is difficult to forecast, but that the process within which this occurs is one in need of urgent evaluation. Even though the fluidity of the communications sector makes it extremely difficult to predict the shape of the industry and the range of equipment that it will provide, it is nonetheless safe to stress that convergence has severe ramifications for the make-up of the communications landscape and television's place within it. However, it is difficult to consider all of the industrial issues that can affect the progress of digital television in depth because of the almost daily fluctuations in this field together with all the other themes covered, so I will confine myself to simply outlining them.

Essential Features of Digital Television

It is perhaps far more straightforward to identify the immediate effect digitalisation will have on television to distinguish it from its previous phase and to pinpoint core elements that have featured prominently in formative debates about the new broadcasting system. Analogue television operates through relaying audio-visual material as a series of continuous waves over the air, which are then reconstituted as moving image and sound on the television screen. Lister et al (2003:15) outline how

³ Stewart (1999) and Owen (1999) provide detailed studies on the issues involved in the convergence of TV and the Internet.

the broadcast message corresponds to wave forms of differing lengths and intensities, encoded as the variable voltage of transmission signals. Thus, broadcasting material has an actual analogous presence when it is conveyed because it is represented by a physical property. Bignell (2004:31) explains that this method of transmitting continuous waves of varying frequency occupies vast quantities of the spectrum and does not permit a return response from viewers. Analogue television therefore operates as a limited technological system, unable to develop functions over and above the provision of a few channels. Purnell (2001:80) feels that it was the effect of consuming huge amounts of bandwidth that necessitated a careful and highly thought-out approach to broadcasting at its inception. His point is that the ideological parameters of broadcasting were set in scope by the nuances of its technological capabilities, resulting as it did in public ownership of the BBC and a mind-set that conceptualised the spectrum as a scarce resource.

Digital transmission essentially comprises an innovative means to process broadcast signals by utilising the binary system of relaying information. Audio-visual material has a numerical value, the particular assignation of which reconstitutes the moving image and sound of the television picture. As a string of noughts and ones, content does not have the same physical nature it does in its analogue guise, but is instead encoded data. Given (1998:23) observes digital transmissions allow content to be compressed because they eliminate redundant information from the signal, conveying only the digits that change between one frame and the next. This increases transmissions capacity massively, thereby improving the efficiency of spectrum use by relaying broadcast messages as a flow of data. As digital content does not occupy anywhere near as much spectrum space as its analogue counterpart, the spare frequencies can be developed for additional services, both in regards to enhancing television, and for wholly separate purposes, such as allocating more space to mobile telephony firms. Another by-product of utilising binary transmissions is that once audio-visual material is created and conveyed digitally, it profits from the vast increases in computing, processing and storage power that are currently taking place (Levy, 1999:4). Television, in effect, becomes a branch of computing, a move which authorises the incursion of a plethora of different sorts of companies into its once hallow precincts.

A **set-top box** is required to convert the broadcast information represented by electronic binary digits into the moving image and sound of the television picture. This device sits on top of conventional television sets and decodes the incoming signals into a form that can be read. While it is also possible to have integrated digital television sets with the software embedded into them obviating the need for additional hardware, set-top boxes have been regarded as a more convenient means to upgrade viewing. The cost of such a box is significantly below that of purchasing a new television and can be easily supplanted thereafter with updated models. Cowie (1997:684) points out that it “contains the vital decompression, demodulation and general intelligent equipment that ensures the smooth running of the system”. The set-top box then comprises of the technical circuitry necessary for upgrading analogue television. Basically, it forms the interface at which television changes and from where it can inhabit the ‘symbolic computational realm’ of a digital media system alluded to earlier. Kim and Sawhney (2002:225) advance that the set-top box is a computer which enables users to communicate with the system and with other users. The greater the storage capacity and processing power of the set-top box, the more functions it can add to the television set, a fact which accounts for its complete centrality in regards to reception.

The conditional access system (CAS) refers to the security mechanism built into the set-top box that acts as a guardian of the services offered. Humphreys and Lang (1998:12) describe how the CAS ensures “that only those viewers who have paid for a programme or information service are able to receive it”. It is thus an encryption system guaranteeing only those who have subscribed to a deal can access it, while non-payers are deprived the service. The CAS makes it possible to have an extensive system of pay-TV, whereby viewers are able to communicate their choices to broadcasters, who in turn supply them because the software endows it with the ability to discriminate between payers and non-payers. Collins and Murrone (1996:39) explain that the CAS has been designed to eliminate third party interference and to ensure a certain revenue stream accompanies the individualisation of broadcasting. The centrality of the CAS to many of the core assumptions upon which digital television is based derives from how it constitutes the secure technical means of a one-to-one relationship between broadcasters and viewers.

Its vital purpose however leaves the CAS open to potential abuse by dominant players who can design it to exclude the services of competitors, thereby influencing what viewers can watch (Feintuck, 1999:112). Without technical systems being harmonised between rival operators, there will be little interoperability between different set-top boxes, an eventuality that raises the probability of viewers remaining locked into the offerings of one provider. Anti-competitive measures, such as using a technical standard that prevents competitors offering their wares through it, must be avoided because it encroaches seriously on the choices viewers have at their disposal. Legally, the platform owner must provide access to other operators on terms that are “fair and reasonable; and do not involve, or tend to give rise to, any undue discrimination against any person” (CA, 2003:59), a stipulation that is designed to outlaw such practises.

The electronic programme guide (EPG) operates as an on-screen navigational tool, formulated specifically for the multitude of choices digital television offers. The EPG works by breaking up channels into genres or favourite programmes, enabling viewers to clearly arrange their viewing from the vast amount of selections. Wedell and Luckham (2001:33) claim the EPG functions as a personal planner, ordering the options in an understandable way to make searching far easier. It is much more comprehensive than standard listings because it can be used to gain extra information about programmes, along with providing alerts of when favourite shows are about to start. Brandrud (1999:129) feels that the EPG is a decisive element of digital television because it acts as the entry-point into the digital world, from where it works as a road map, and that in time it will assume the appearance of a web page as it increases in technical sophistication.

The EPG could however be a trouble-spot owing to its importance as the site at which options are presented to viewers. Hancock (1998:128) stresses it could make or break a digital service as it forms the crucial link in the delicate chain between broadcasters and viewers. The fear is that platform owners could place their own channels at the top of lists, thereby gaining extra attention every time the EPG is used, and/or alternatively, placing channels similar to their own but offered by other player’s further down the list of choices. On these grounds Bazalgette (2001:75) emphasises that while the EPG will be a key battleground amongst broadcasters, it

must function as a perfect search engine, not one that favours the platform owners own channels or those who can buy prominence.

A **multiplex** refers to the blocks of spectrum broadcasters are permitted to occupy. It is defined by Papathanassopoulos (2002:35) as “the frequency spectrum allocated to operators on which they decide which programmes to carry”. These decisions are made by Government and they ultimately determine the range of services broadcasters will be able to develop as all ventures have to be formulated in respect of the frequencies assigned to them. Given (1998:41) clarifies how the right to operate a multiplex is separately licensed and regulated from the programme services carried on them. To operate a multiplex then confers upon broadcasters the initial means of carriage within the digital television system.

Personal video recorders (PVR's) are another innovation that have numerous implications for the experience of viewing. These devices are also placed on the top of existing television sets, although the next generation of hardware supplied by Sky is combining their functionality with those of the set-top box to integrate the elements of both into one instrument (Hughes and Marshall, 2002:25). The Digital TV Group (DTG), an industry association committed to the promotion of digital television in Britain, list on their website how PVR's enable viewers to:

- record one programme while watching another;
- record one programme but skip back to watch a highlight again;
- record automatically the whole series of a favourite show;
- start watching a programme from the beginning after it has started;
- pause and fast-forward a programme that is being watched;
- select in advance what they want to record and watch because of the downloaded schedules built into the PVR;
- have programmes suggested to them by the PVR from its ability to build up a profile of probable selections based on past choices (DTG, 2004).

All of the above illuminate how PVR's bestow a greater degree of control to audiences who can fix the timing and flow of programming to suit their needs through the capability to freeze and fast-forward. PVR's can also automatically deliver the sorts of choices a viewer would want because it can evaluate the schedules in relation to previous decisions, before making suggestions that should suit the viewer. Bignell (2004:57) stresses that this ability could render the idea of specific channels redundant



because it creates a menu for each user based on their interests that can subsequently be watched at any time, allowing audiences to time-shift with far more sophistication than the VCR. Individuals are then served with targeted choices, each of which can be viewed at times and in ways that suits individual needs. Hughes and Marshall (2002:25) argue PVR's offer considerably more functionality than VCR's as they are easier to use with on-screen guides, enabling viewers to sort through recorded material with more convenience, and also because the high capacity drive has large storage space that will not degrade over time.

There are however serious consequences for advertising when viewers have the ability to skip unwanted material. Lovegrove and Mombro (2001:51) draw on research from the USA when outlining how PVR's could cannibalise somewhere between 50-90% of advertisements when audiences have the ability to fast-forward, as has been suggested by trials. This has profound reverberations in regards to the revenues typically raised by what has become a de facto means of financing television because the very essence of funding the majority of the system is under threat. The implications of the PVR have understandably sent a shudder through the broadcasting industry, particularly as Griffiths (2003:164) notes that no solution has been formulated in response to such a fundamental development, rendering the need to hastily devise new business models.

Advantages of Digital Television

As well as altering the hardware and technical elements of television, digitalisation holds numerous positive consequences for the actual services the medium can offer, most of which figure in governmental and industrial literature. Digital constitutes an advancement over analogue television because it engenders:

- **More channels.** Through the compression of the broadcast message that digital technology affords, there is a far more efficient use of the available spectrum to release extra bandwidth with which to develop additional television services. Digital transmissions occupy far less capacity than analogue, facilitating between 4-8 channels to be squeezed into the frequency

space normally allocated to one analogue channel (Brandrud, 1999:123). This overcomes the technical constraints endemic to spectrum scarcity, raising the probability of an explosion in channels to potentially serve a greater diversity of themes by catering for more specialist subjects. Allen (1998:64) confirms that compression enables broadcasters to formulate niche channels on singular issues, allowing minority interests to be addressed more fully.

- **Improvements in signal quality.** Digital technology enhances the technical quality of the television sound and picture because it generates a sharper image through encoded processes that carry broadcast signals with greater clarity than analogue. Murdock (2000b:45) explains digital signals are not subject to atmospheric conditions, guaranteeing the picture will not be obscured by snow and that images will not distort. Lax (1997:43) outlines how set manufacturers are doubling the number of lines that make up the screen from 625 to 1250 because this fits more into the frame to form a high definition picture. Also, employing the widescreen format of a 16:9 aspect ratio, rather than the 4:3 definition analogue is based on, upgrades the shape of the television image because it creates a more natural frame for viewing by the human eye to produce further expansive visual possibilities (Given, 1998:22). These technical factors result in a high resolution television picture that allows more visual detail to be conveyed aligned to the improvements in the quality of sound. Such innovations are designed to elevate the viewing experience of television closer to the cinematic one in terms of sensory feeling and overall enjoyment (Lister et al, 2003:67).

- **Video On Demand (VOD).** Digitalisation has the capability of letting viewers choose directly from a set menu what they wish to view at a particular moment in time on payment of a fee because it makes use of a return path between viewers and broadcasters. Feldman (1997:87) clarifies how this service is an example of a genuinely one-to-one interaction, with either movies or sports events being requested by an individual to be supplied by the broadcaster. It is in effect a type of video rental service as customers can select a one-off purchase in the same way as they would when renting a film. VOD is a highly convenient service because it responds exactly to consumer choice,

giving viewers the opportunity to directly select the content they want. Near video on demand (NVOD) is a less advanced variation, whereby the same film is shown across a number of channels at staggered starting times. The proliferation in the number of channels makes it possible to have the same film start at 15 minute intervals enabling viewers to tune in at a time of their convenience. Galik (2002:71) details how NVOD has been applied to sport, and has extended the borders of consumer choice, with the BBC's coverage of Wimbledon simultaneously broadcasting five tennis matches at the same time, permitting viewers to decide which one they want to watch.

- **Interactivity.** This is perhaps the most distinct feature of digital television and it encapsulates the substance of many of the changes that are seeping through the communications environment, particularly as it is thought to signal a major paradigmatic shift from analogue media. While Van Dijk and de Vos (2001:455) document how there is no clear definition of interactivity, even within the television industry itself, it has nonetheless become a recurring label associated with digital media. Most commentators emphasise the ability it confers upon audiences to become more actively involved with the creation and selection of broadcasting material⁴. The communication process of digital television is not unilinear as messages can travel from audiences to broadcasters via a phone or cable link. A starting point would therefore be to invoke Jensen and Toscan's (1999:16) idea that it amounts to 'two way television' as it enables users to input direct feedback into the system to alter the choice, text and course of a programme.

Although theorists observe that there has long been some form of interactivity in television (Newby, 1997:188), digitalisation increases its sophistication markedly since it lets viewers select the content they are to receive and then shape it in certain ways. For instance, after calling up a football match of their choosing, the viewer can watch it from a particular angle and click onto supplementary information regarding players. Individuals can also play along with quiz shows and participate in voting scenarios in certain programmes that

⁴ As audience members can now be actively involved in the construction of broadcasting the term 'users' is more appropriate as digital television allows them to become more than simply 'viewers'.

ask for audience opinions. Bignell (2004:266) explains interactivity enables viewers to alter narrative sequences where they can choose from alternative endings to dramas and have the climax that they see as most fitting. These qualities illustrate how digital interactivity configures programming to take greater direction from viewers. Crisell (1997:258) sums up three core aspects of interactivity are that it grants viewers the opportunity to *respond*, *modify* and *initiate* broadcast messages on a personal basis. Rather than just receive material, viewers can involve themselves more intimately with the broadcast experience because the return path enables them to intervene in programmes and fine-tune the end result.

Holland (2000:230) claims this scope to talk back to the television set gives viewers more control over the timing and presentation of what they watch to the effect that it forges a more participatory relationship. Interactivity means broadcasters are directly linked to their audiences from which a number of desirable outcomes are possible that centre on the need to respond exactly to the demands of the audience. Once achieved, the viewer can engage with the text and use additional services in whichever way they want. On these grounds, Curran and Seaton (2003:276) describe interactivity as the 'ultimate seduction' because of its ability to allow viewers to tailor broadcasting and other services to suit individual needs, reflective of the way in which the medium responds to each person's demands accordingly. Similarly, Galik (2002:69) feels this feature adds a genuinely original dimension to media consumption through the possibility of heightened levels of activity in people's engagement of television, from where they are able to directly influence the mass communication process.

- **Personalization.** The capacity to return individual messages permits each viewer to shape their own programming diet and to utilise the ancillary information services in a manner specific to their liking. It will be revealed how digitalisation offers a gamut of services, but the key point here is that each viewer can use them however they want. The essential features of digital television install a degree of individuality that liberates viewers from the rigidity of the schedule, illuminating how the medium has been designed for

singular, proactive use, and is reflected in the themed services that are emerging. Doyle (2002:149) explains how viewers taking control, exercising personal choice and constructing self-schedules is the principal advantage of digital media. Direct payments through conditional access technology endow viewers with a greater degree of power over what they watch because they are making concrete decisions in tune with willingness to pay.

Viewers can tailor their consumption through pay-per-view and time-shifting options that allow programming to dovetail exactly with personal needs. Each individual's consumption of television can differ, not only in terms of programme choices and timing, but also in the use to which they can actually put the television set. According to Cairncross (2001:62), this creates a distinct phenomenon of 'Me TV' as people pick and mix what suits them on an individual basis, a trend that in time could augment a reinvigorated broadcasting system structured according to the tastes of each individual.

- **Enhanced programmes.** Digitalisation adds to television's role of broadcasting a text by providing several options connected to a programme that allow viewers to seek extra details on certain elements associated with it. Brandrud (1999:124) explains how programmes can be buttressed by additional information such as supporting material which appears as a web page on part of the screen or supplementary subject-matter such as extra commentary in sporting events. Viewers can then follow up content to gain more in-depth insight on topics which interest them by clicking on the relevant icon. This links them to web sites and it augments the act of viewing by permitting the exploration of salient themes. Indeed, Murdock, (2000b:50) finds with Internet sites linked to programmes, the active life of a transmission is extended as viewers can e-mail comments to programme makers, participate in discussions and share their opinions on message boards. This gives programming an extra dimension that can benefit audiences enormously.

Stewart (1999:246) shows how chatrooms are an example of a social community building up around a television programme, with conversations linking in and out of the broadcasting material to the extent that audiences can

establish direct connections with like-minded people. Follow-up information options illustrate how there are clear and convenient ways for viewers to unite across a shared interest. Griffiths (2003:153) details how this feature has proved successful across genres because gaining extra insight on pertinent themes is an advantage that appeals across the board, whether it is sports, news, factual programmes or entertainment shows. The net effect of enhancing programmes with supplementary information is to grant audiences the option of a greater depth of involvement on topics that interest them and a number of communication conduits to transmit their views.

- **New services.** The more efficient use of spectrum frees up frequencies that can be used to facilitate the enlargement of functions television can now carry out. Digital television operators have developed 'walled garden' services that offer a portal-like suite of applications, such as gaming, shopping and banking (Galik, 2002:72). A clear example is 'BSkyB Interactive' (formerly known as 'Open'), which acts as a gateway on the platform's digital service from where viewers can shop, bank, access e-mail and play games. Other services in gestation include gambling options connected to a programme and direct links from shows to a purchasing site where viewers can buy products associated with the programme.

These e-commerce ventures illuminate how digital television is not just about the provision of programming, as it has the ability to supply a whole host of services that benefit the convenience of viewers in activities that were previously unconnected to television. Crisell (1997:259) explains that the ordering of goods and having them delivered is an example of the domestication of shopping. The ability to execute transactions through the set is indicative of the manner in which the medium is intended to become more involved in the routine activities of daily life so audiences do not have to travel to particular places for certain needs. The functions of shopping and banking from home endow television with a greater intimacy in relation to everyday tasks, signalling how the medium becomes identified with a plethora of activities that accompany its traditional role of imparting entertainment. Also, Lister et al (2003:20) observe that this service is a reduced type of Internet

access for those without a PC. A walled garden therefore offers a limited but important foray into the cyber world for those without it.

There is a degree of excitement within the industry because of the possibilities these services raise in regards to uncovering new revenue streams, given that the firms within the portal pay the digital television operator for their presence. These functions also demonstrate how the medium can extract fees directly from viewers. Moreover, Bignell (2004:269) feels it is highly probable that betting will become a major source of revenue for interactive television with a direct fee going to the service provider each time a bet is made.

Taken together, these features generate immense possibilities and signify a deep-seated change in the functions of television through a multiplicity of distinctive technological factors. It is clear why rhetoric emanating from Government and the industry frames digitalisation as a fundamental break in television's evolution, given that it grafts a plethora of services and novel elements onto the medium. The new television is characterised by *more channels, distinctive components* and *different types of functions* as compared to analogue television, and is a considerable technological advancement for those reasons. The notion of interactivity underpins many of the benefits digital television offers and its logic is thought to symbolise a radical departure from its analogue counterpart, particularly as it postulates a unique model of media-audience interaction. Jensen and Toscan (1999:13) regard digital television as a point-to-point, rather than a broadcast medium, in that it responds to each user's demands to grant them a greater degree of control in terms of what to view, how to watch it and the ability to use the set in a variety of spheres.

For these reasons, Negroponte (1995:84) describes digital as a 'pull' technology in that individuals can arrange their viewing habits and the purposes for which they wish to use the television set in accordance with their own needs. People now have the technological faculties with which to make demands of their television, and in doing so, are effectively pulling services they so desire towards themselves. This contrasts with the 'push' format of traditional media, where information is pressed at viewers and the only choice is to accept or reject a basic service (ibid.). Such control has potentially enormous implications for the ways in which individuals

consume television. For Harding (2000:4), the logic of digitalisation instils a shift in the nature of the medium from being a 'sit back' experience to a 'lean forward' activity that involves more user engagement as with the PC, to initiate a proactive type of 'smart' viewing. This uncovers a sentiment within the industry that its advantages will establish digital television quickly, because people will learn how to use these functions and become accustomed to a more active mode of viewing where choice and control preside, as individuals navigate their own routes through the multitude of options. While this remains to be seen, it is clear that digitalisation converts television into a totally different proposition to that of the analogue era.

Owen (1999:28) clarifies how the topology of a communication network defines the nature of the message it can effectively carry. That is, the underlying configurations of a medium determine the scope of the communication that takes place through it because these factors impose a method on how the information is imparted. Digitalisation adds considerably to the one-to-many, unidirectional structure of traditional broadcasting because the technological arrangement of the system allows communication between individuals and from them back to the message source. Its return path means digital television has an expansive range of communicative possibilities that analogue is unable to offer and it is this quality which excites many commentators.

Kim and Sawhney (2002:219) explain how the analogue system ensures television acts as a closed and rigid special purpose machine owing to the institutional controls and technological restrictions that define it. Their stance advances how a television system of limited technical means dictates that only a one way flow of communication distributed along a few channels can pass through it, a fact that accounts for the heavy regulation of the analogue age that committed its services towards prescribed, elitist objectives. Digitalisation obliterates these constraints to expand exponentially the medium's communicative possibilities and to prise open the purposes for which television can be used. According to Bickerstaffe (2001:106), the intention of these technological additions is to develop television into a complete communications system to move the medium beyond its constrained analogue remit.

However, in moving forward, the certainties and established practises of the analogue age are being challenged by the processes which accompany this shift. One immediate problem concerns the degree to which audience sovereignty could lead to a decline in the consumption of news and other serious programming. For instance, with far more programming choices the danger is that the news could easily lose viewers in the ratings driven climate of a digital system, an eventuality that has serious consequences in regards to the political literacy of citizens. Furthermore, the ability to avoid advertisements could pose difficulties in raising money for programme making from what has been the traditional source of finance. Other stable funding methods will need to be unearthed quickly in order to provide a steady income stream. Such themes illuminate that the move to a digital system of broadcasting entails several potential dislocations to key areas. Therefore, the logic that digitalisation instils necessitates some careful thinking for broadcasters because the ruptures that accompany the shift have severe consequences not just for future prosperity but for survival itself.

The Platforms

There is a range of routes on which to distribute digital television (see figure 4.1 on page 111) and each of these platforms as they are known, has implications for the type of services provided and the cost to consumers. Griffiths (2003:57) defines a platform as the technical means by which viewers can receive electronic content and explains that it is of central importance because it is the supply line which uncovers the critical link with the audience. The platform therefore constitutes the initial gateway by which the riches of the digital world can be accessed by viewers and forms the crucial interface at which digital television is distributed and received.

Analogue television was characterised by a universal method of transmitting broadcast signals over-the-air to the effect that it became the de facto standard of that age. Digital television has from the outset a variety of diffusion methods in that signals are transmitted along a number of technological routes, each system correlating with different organisations and service deals. Indeed, the Labour Government (DCMS/DTI, 2001) has extolled the virtue of Britain being the first

country in the world to offer digital television on a variety of different delivery platforms. This not only reflects the ambition it and the industry has by increasing the avenues with which to reach viewers, but also the desire to bestow different levels of choice to the audience, whereby individuals can dovetail their version of television right down to how it is distributed to them. A BBC/ITC report (2003:8) outlines how there are four ways to receive digital television and that each is closely identified with particular organisations that provide the service. They are:

- **Digital terrestrial** (BBC, Digital 3&4, SDN and Freeview). This delivery system works in exactly the same way as analogue television as audio-visual material is distributed over the air. Harding (2000:4) outlines that programmes are stored as electronic bits to be transferred to an antenna, usually from a high location like the top of a hill or tall building. The signals are then sent to conventional aerials on the roofs of houses. When the broadcast signal is received, it is relayed to the set-top box above the television or straight into an integrated set, either of which converts the digital broadcast into an analogue stream that can be displayed on the television (ibid.). The only expense to viewers is the receiving equipment of the set-top box and, in some cases, the replacement of older aerials.

Originally, this service was provided by OnDigital (later rebranded as ITV Digital), an ITV venture that launched in the autumn of 1998 and collapsed in May 2002, incurring huge losses in the process. In October 2002, the BBC was awarded the digital terrestrial licenses and has begun to offer a free-to-air service of basic (that is non-subscription) channels in partnership with the parties mentioned above. This Freeview option has been marketed under the 'plug and play' label, owing to its simplicity as viewers need only purchase a £40 set-top box which they attach to their televisions in order to access about 30 non-premium channels. The terrestrial nature of delivery uncovers two extremely pertinent aspects of this delivery system, as observed by Papathanaspolous (2002:37), in that it works with a standard aerial making it potentially universally available, but is restricted in terms of its spectrum, leaving it unable to offer anything other than a basic service.

Digital terrestrial is commonly regarded by many commentators as the cheap and economical method by which to convert the vast majority to digital television because it involves the least cost and disruption to the hardware apparatus of analogue television. Briggs and Burke (2002:277) confirm how there have been great hopes invested in the digital terrestrial platform owing to the ease with which it could facilitate uptake of the whole technology. This method has thus assumed a major political significance as a means with which to achieve wider plans of switchover as it is an extremely cost effective and straight-forward way of converting customers.

A new service by 'Top Up TV' aims to overcome some of its limitations because it enables viewers to subscribe to a more select band of 10 extra channels by purchasing a card that is to be inserted into the set-top box on payment of a monthly fee. However, some set-top boxes and all integrated televisions do not have the required conditional access module slot for the insertion of the card and will therefore need to have this facility built into their existing hardware if users want to upgrade their basic Freeview service to include this option.

- **Digital satellite (BSkyB).** This platform requires the receiving equipment of a satellite dish that has an external line of sight to the Astra 2 and Eurobird satellites, and a set top box signal converter, many of which have been subsidised by BSkyB in an effort to stimulate take-up. Harding (2000:4) points out that broadcast signals are sent from a ground station to either of these satellites, which then beam the signal to the dish on people's houses. When it is received, the signal is passed onto the set-top box to convert it into a format that can be displayed on the television. The broadcast message, which crosses national boundaries given that the satellite footprint stretches over several countries, includes those of encrypted pay-TV channels which the box can decode because its software enables it to distinguish between payers and non-payers. This method of distributing television is known as direct broadcasting by satellite (DBS) as there is no cable intermediary involved, but instead an uninterrupted transmission path from the satellite to the home (Lax, 1997:66). Satellite broadcasting is also not as stringently subject to programming

regulation because its operators have successfully argued that its point of transmission is not within this country, a fact which exempts it from conventional broadcasting rules (Papathanaspolous, 2002:50).

This platform has the potential to provide hundreds of channels as Lax (1997:66) explains the frequency of the microwave carrier is much larger, permitting the transmission of a far greater volume of information than the terrestrial platform. Theoretically, satellite customers can access up to a thousand channels and a full complement of interactive services through a multitude of different service deals. The subscription cost varies according to the package viewers request from the most exclusive that include the premium content of top class sport and the latest blockbuster movies, to a far cheaper alternative that is similar to Freeview in that there is only a one-off charge for a basic cohort of channels. Its owner, Rupert Murdoch, has secured the rights to the most popular forms of television content, and this has become its principal selling point, as well as major bargaining tool with the other platform operators. While the satellite platform can spread its custom base widely to benefit from the virtually universal coverage it has, Griffiths (2003:66) outlines that it has no return line of its own from which to communicate with viewers. Such a connection has to be provided by a telecommunications company, which then enjoys the subsequent revenues garnered by the transactions made.

- **Digital cable** (NTL and Telewest). This platform utilises a direct link in to the home via underground co-axial cable networks that connect to the domestic set-top box. Harding (2000:4) observes the digital message is transmitted from a ground station to a satellite which then sends the signal to a large satellite receiver that serves a cable network, which in turn is connected to people's homes through the set-top box. Lax (1997:67) clarifies how this method is unlike other forms of television delivery because it requires a physical connection of a cable between the transmitter and receiver, the bandwidth of which allows many channels to be carried. Its plentiful capacity, although not quite in the same proportion as satellite, enables the platform to potentially supply a few hundred channels.

Some commentators believe cable's properties make it the best suited distribution platform for digital television, as Cowie (1997:681) explains it has the return path included in the delivery infrastructure. The cable system was originally conceived to relay telephony signals, a purpose that resulted in its architecture being configured for the two-way carriage of data. Its digital television service benefits from the direct cable connection that links the viewers back to the service provider, enabling them to interact more closely with the message source and the programme content. Indeed, Given (1998:27) feels digital cable television should develop sophisticated interactivity of the point-and-click kind associated with computer software and the Internet because of this. The cable companies are able to have diverse interests in the communications market because of their control of this key infrastructure upon which information services can be disseminated. The unique selling point of this platform is the application of the direct connection to provide what Lovegrove and Momburu (2001:51) label a 'triple play' of services to include digital television, telephony and Internet access as part of the same package.

However, the digital cable platform is in fact a *carrier* rather than a broadcaster of television in the sense that its companies do not own or produce very much of the content it transmits, having instead to secure deals with its rivals and individual channel operators. It is therefore a conduit, albeit a highly significant one, on which television is carried, though its status convinces Collins (2002b:153) that it is actually a relay system for BSkyB. Given that its livelihood in the digital television market depends solely on the content it can negotiate from its competitors, they also subsequently benefit from the success it enjoys because their content is reaching more customers through this route.

The need to establish a physical link uncovers important elements that have implications for the penetration digital cable television can achieve. This is not an option for the majority of rural viewers because it is not financially viable for the cable companies to recoup the cost of laying out the infrastructure in sparsely populated areas with few customers (BBC/ITC, 2003:9). Even in the cities to which it is largely confined, the cable companies incur huge costs in

installing the necessary cabling. Negrine (1994:187) explains the requirement of digging up and reinstating roads for cable networks to operate amounts to an enormous capital outlay. Digital cable television is therefore a delivery platform that has unique characteristics, some of which are technologically advantageous for its customers, while others present problems that may affect its long-term success.

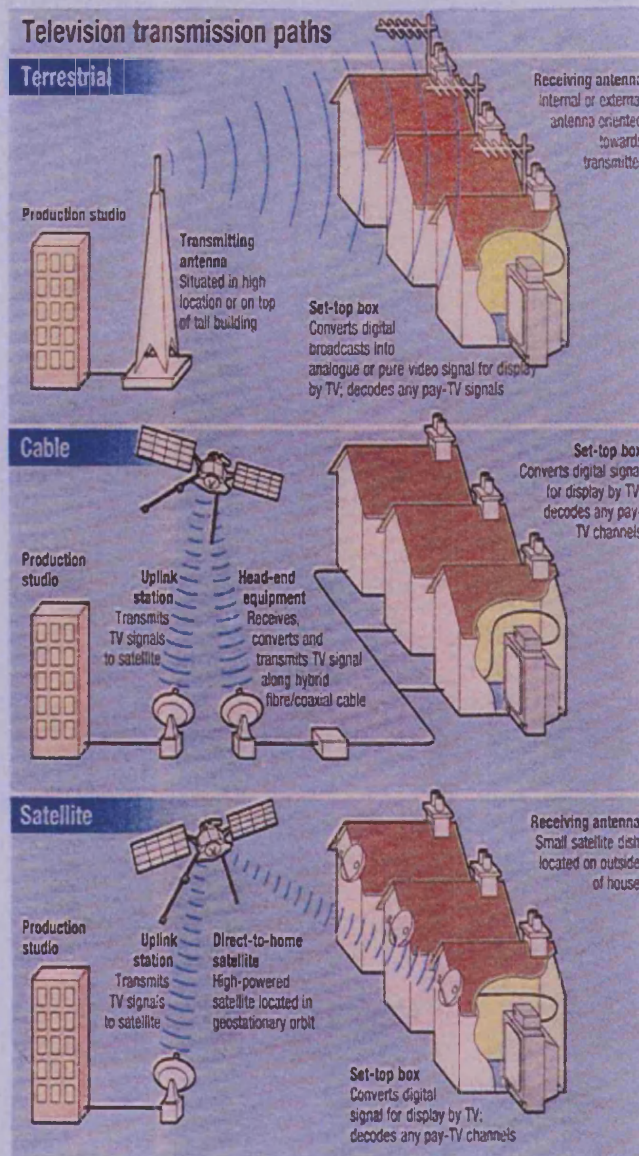
- **Broadband TV** (Kingston Communications and Choice). There is a less widespread method of digital television that utilises the advancements in infrastructure for distribution. Digital television services have been launched in some areas on digital subscriber line technology (DSL) which allows high bandwidth transmission on a conventional residential telephone line (BBC/ITC, 2003:8). Broadband television operates by relaying broadcast signals along the increased capacity of the telephone line, with Kingston Communications serving Hull, and Home Choice offering the same service for parts of London. These companies have upgraded their basic cabling to increase the bandwidth of the telephone networks in those locations to offer a menu of programmes to viewers. Griffiths (2003:69) explains this upgrading means there is a broad enough Internet connection to bring full-screen television pictures straight into the home via the telephone line and that the data transmissions are far quicker than conventional networks, bringing a faster and 'always on' Internet connection with it. While this is an alternative method of distributing television, it is as yet confined to a few areas and can not be considered an option for most viewers.

All of this demonstrates how digital television can be supplied through a variety of delivery systems as the means of distribution are no longer universal, illuminating another sharp contrast with the ubiquitous nature of terrestrial transmissions that typified the analogue era. Thomas (1999:11) feels that because digital television can be diffused along alternative routes, competition within broadcasting should intensify, as the drive for viewers is to be fought across platforms as well as channels. Although all of the platforms are quite distinct, each is attempting to establish itself as the dominant standard of digital television, something it can only attain at the expense of its rivals. Furthermore, Collins

(2002b:152) reasons that the plurality of transmissions paths testifies to the Government's loss of control over entry into the television market, as the right to broadcast is no longer heavily guarded. New entrants, such as emerging channels, have a plethora of outlets from which to reach audiences, an eventuality that could increase competition as the means of distribution have become a point of contest.

Wedell and Luckham (2001:28) point out that it is important to have numerous paths for delivering digital television, given that none of them is likely to have universal coverage. Therefore, audiences will still have some sort of choice between two methods in those areas where a particular system can not penetrate. The authors also feel it is likely to be a source of confusion for audiences as they try and make sense of the difference between the alternative methods for the type of television service they are to receive. While there are distinct advantages (and shortcomings) associated with each platform, it makes the arguments for a plurality of methods more compelling. Indeed, Lovegrove and Momburu (2001:51) advance that the diversity of platforms is a source of strength, as each method offers a unique set of functional attributes that will be better suited to different applications and different customers. For example, some viewers may need the cheap upgrade that the terrestrial platform offers, while others might be best served by the hundreds of channels served by digital satellite. Finally, the heightened degrees of interactivity and Internet access of digital cable would be appealing to some customers. Overall, the fact that digital television does not have a unitary method of transmission indicates that it has a range of industrial actors responsible for managing it and that these individuals make use of a variety of technological methods for its diffusion. This also illustrates how the delivery of broadcasting services is itself now a significant issue to the extent that it forms an important area of rivalry.

Figure 4.1: The three main ways to receive digital television



Source: Harding (2000:4).

Overview

This chapter has documented the shifting terrain of the current media landscape, drawing attention to how the ‘weightless bits’ of digital technology pose a number of serious questions for the communications system. It has proceeded to illuminate how television takes direction from these technological changes to set in motion another quantum leap in its evolution. The familiar ‘look’ of television dissipates to be replaced by a novel consumer device that establishes different routes to the audience in addition to providing more functions and information services. Digitalisation engenders change at several junctures of analogue television through its requirement for certain items of hardware, as well as altering the methods of distribution and revolutionizing the way its multiplicity of offerings are presented and utilised. Uricchio (2002:219) argues this amounts to a redefinition of the medium for the new age by expanding the services it delivers and changing the notion of its audience interface. The transformation is fundamental then not only for increasing television’s remit, but also through initiating what is seen to be a paradigmatic shift for the manner in which audiences interact with the medium. It is these factors that collectively convert television into what Levy (1999:1) describes as a multipurpose/multimedia terminal, reflective of an entirely original entity and experience that reworks the way people engage with their sets and the objectives for which they use it.

Television is therefore in the process of transmogrifying from being ‘the box in the corner’ to becoming ‘the magic box’, endowed with a panoply of services that supersede its analogue predecessor exponentially. Some commentators envisage digitalisation as an initial step in television ultimately developing into the control hub of the future home, when it will have the ability to organise the heating and order shopping, as well as performing a whole range of other such tasks (Hughes and Marshall, 2002:26). This projection stresses how as a ‘smart’ utility device, aligned to its centrality within the domestic space, the digital incarnation of television will eventually enable it to form the primary node of the family unit from where any number of household chores can be performed. Digital technology can certainly

achieve this because of the network properties it has, allowing television to be more intimately interwoven within the rhythms of daily life through carrying out routine activities. This scenario displays how digitalisation extends the medium's constitution so that it can execute an array of duties that were impossible in its analogue phase, raising its profile as a means of communication.

It is clear that digital television comprises of much more than what is commonly understood as television and challenges the definition articulated in Chapter One on its criteria of being a public medium and for large audiences, because this development is configured around the notion of catering for individual tastes. The question of what television ultimately is has significant financial and discursive implications according to Uricchio (2002:219), because digital media transform and compete with existing processes of production, distribution and exhibition. This acknowledges that change permeates the entire field of communications, as different media seek definition in an emerging environment in which the underlying industrial dynamics of change are difficult to anticipate. Digitalisation therefore imposes different imperatives in regards to how firms operate and on their funding structures, signifying a process of realignment in the industrial context of television (Doyle, 2002:75). In sum, this shift has massive implications for the regulation and economics of television because the industry is currently moving away from a familiar business model towards an as yet unknown formula that makes sense of these changes.

Yet it must be stressed that that the initial promotion and progression of digital television in Britain has not been entirely demand led. The Labour Government has pushed it onto audiences with a massive concerted campaign since 1998 because of the commercial advantages they believe it offers the nation as well as the benefits it brings to viewing that they feel need to be exploited, as will be demonstrated later. Given that the transition involves a number of upheavals for viewers in terms of how they engage with the medium and significant financial costs, audiences may not otherwise have had the desire to alter their cultural habits so quickly. This feature highlights that while the technology has been supported for the series of opportunities it brings, its adoption has relied heavily upon the market being stimulated because many viewers may be content with analogue television.

Many of the key elements outlined in this chapter will recur throughout the thesis because they are determining the shape of digital television and have subsequently formed part of major struggles for control. I will raise how political actors are assessing their strategies in the light of digitalisation to document how its core issues are being managed before highlighting the evident patterns in programming. Holland (2000:4) observes that the changes are ideological as well as technological in the sense that the very values on which the medium was initially formulated, alongside its resulting relationship with the audience, are being overhauled. While this chapter has revealed the technological nature of digitalisation, the next task is to incorporate this understanding into a theoretical system in order to examine its ideological aspects, something which should go some way to explaining the full significance of digital television.

Chapter 5: Theory - Visions of the Future

This chapter offers a series of theories that seek to comprehend the full significance of digital technology for the future shape of television. It outlines six major positions on the topic by surveying the existing literature to highlight the array of discourses associated with digitalisation to explain how this development can be conceived¹. Several writers stress that theory should be used both to guide the research process and as an eventual explanatory system for the overall interpretation of data (Babbie, 1998; Berger, 2000; Newbold et al, 2002; Wimmer and Dominick, 2003). As theory has an established sense of investigating phenomena, it sets out specific tools for the examination of the topic by providing a sustained means of thinking and marking out certain directions in which to investigate. In doing so, it emphasises different ways in which change, in this instance digitalisation, can be perceived by laying down a number of themes to pursue.

The need for theory is emphasised by Defleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989:30) who explain how communication research must be guided by a basic set of assumptions about the nature of society, the individual and of the relationship between the two. This is what theory does in that it invokes certain ideas concerning the phenomena and delineates how variables are related to each other by setting out a context for the relationships within the social world. Thus, theory generates precise research questions which focus the project and pinpoint angles of inquiry together with a set of themes to investigate and understand (Boyd-Barrett, 2002:9). Research is therefore structured around particular issues of concern which underline the overall rationale for the project, which in this case is to consider the impact of technological change on an established medium. The overarching question is of how to accurately

¹ Many of the ideas for this Chapter were worked out with Professor Kevin Williams, to whom I express my gratitude.

conceptualise digital television and incorporate it into a theoretical system so that its social significance can be fully understood.

Wimmer and Dominick (2003:467) define theory as “a set of related propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relationships among concepts”. Such propositions are key to the research process as they constitute the sites of analysis on which the actual investigation will take place. The task is then to develop hypotheses that are informed by theory and variously tackle the question of (digital) technology and change before subjecting them to testing so that the explanatory power is contingent upon evidence. Hornig Priest (1996:8) argues that explanation is always the goal for theory to the extent that reasoned predictions can be made regarding what will happen in a new situation. Observations are given a grounding because of this and it is possible to see how the phenomenon fits into a larger picture along with likely developments.

Boyd-Barrett (2002:7) claims that through this method theory allows us to make reasoned predictions about the future because it posits certain relationships between different parts of the social world. By fusing together factors and occurrences it is possible to comprehend interactions between variables, their relative importance and their relationships to the social system. In sum, theory enables complex phenomena to be grasped intellectually by deconstructing the area of interest into its main parts which it then reconstructs to interpret its mutual relationships in the relevant context (Newbold et al, 2002:XIII).

Having acknowledged its centrality to the project the next issue to contemplate is which theories to select. After all, each has its own focus, uses and methodological tools and will therefore engender vast differences in the shape of the research (Defleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1989:125). My aim to make sense of technological change has itself been informed by accounts which address this issue and attempt to understand the overall significance of digital technology. McQuail (2000:127) explains how the new communications essential capacity of interactivity is forcing a change in how the media is conceptualised. Thus, theories that can accommodate this and other salient features of digital technology have been selected. I have therefore chosen those

accounts which directly address the question of what this innovation means for television by reviewing the literature on the general themes that this topic is related to.

A chief task has been to follow Negrine's (1994:31) insistence that media theory for the twenty-first century provide intellectual coherence of the changed circumstances within which the media now function. The communication system has undergone huge changes over a long period of time and theory has to be able to account for this to the extent that it can explain the full importance of the application of digital technology to television. The theories I have selected are amongst the most prominent in communication research and have been drawn upon extensively to explain the role, operations and significance of the media in the modern world. Some of these have been utilised to explain the emergence of previously new technologies and hold established positions within the canon of media studies.

I have also sought to scan the ideological spectrum so that the positions outlined vary between perceiving this change as essentially emancipatory through to seeing it as a means of social control. I have attempted to follow Webster's (2002) outline by scrutinising major contributions to understanding the role of information in the modern world and recent trends in the domain of communications. My focus has been narrower in that I am considering change only as it pertains towards television in its newest incarnation, rather than the whole panoply of transformations in the realm of communications. Still, Webster's investigation on the nature of change and particular nuances of digital technology provides a strong framework from which to approximate the reality of digital television, as has some of the scholarly work he has surveyed. Overall, I am outlining major contributions to the topic from which the direction of the medium can be delineated so that its range of consequences for society can be unravelled.

The Free Market

This perspective begins from the premise that digital technology introduces an array of opportunities to update the medium of television and improve the viewing experience of audience members. Commentators point out how it would be damaging to ignore the material advantages this technology can deliver to the nation (Inglewood, 2000:87; Stelzer, 2001:37). Such benefits are optimised only when particular structural adjustments are administered to harness its full potential. The aim is to create a free market in the communications industry to provide consumers with the most complete set of choices preserving individual sovereignty in the process. A new climate of openness must guide the organisation of digital television, a condition that demands directing regulatory attention towards realigning the policy structures of a medium that has considerably changed. This viewpoint is heavily laden with an economic rationale and Libertarian theory on the primacy of individuals who will best be served by a deregulated television system (Brittan, 1989; Murdoch, 1989; Thatcher, 1993; Veljanovski, 1989; Veljanovski 2001; Sawers, 1996; Purnell, 2001; Stelzer, 2001). This new communications environment will also bolster the economic functions of television, highlighting its role as a creative industry at the same time as safeguarding the welfare of individuals, by improving its industrial proficiency.

Libertarian theory is rooted in the belief that individual freedom is paramount in a democratic society. Hayek (1960:11) defines liberty as an absence of coercion and the ability of individuals to pursue their own desires accordingly. Such autonomy is threatened by the actions of an over-protective State that has over-stepped its core role to enforce property rights and must therefore be curtailed. Indeed, Nozick (1974:333) argues that no State more extensive than a minimalist one can be justified since any additional duties constitute a morally unjustifiable infringement on the rights of individuals. This position is grounded in classical economic theory whereby the free market is the most effective allocative device to issue the optimum range of goods and services. Social life has to be organised around such an approach to derive the maximum return from each area of activity. Traditional economic theory advances how competition and the private motive lead individuals to serve the general will unintentionally. This occurs through consumers simply following their own interests,

guided by the 'invisible hand' of the market, which delivers that which is most desired by aggregating individual decisions and then supplying the upshot at the cheapest price possible (Johansson, 1991:2).

Libertarians stress how individuals are the best judges of their own welfare and must therefore be left to choose for themselves from a range of options that which suits them in all walks of life. Its ideological thrust can be summarised as follows:

The paradigm which conceptualises public space as an instrument of private choice regards the preferred setting for the good life as a market, a space where individual men and women, consumers rather than producers, choose among a maximum number of options and where the autonomous individual confronts his/her possibilities of ultimate being (Venturelli, 1998:42).

Competition is the mechanism for ensuring the free market operates efficiently given that the private provision of goods and services has the advantage of keeping prices low (Hayek, 1960:227). Attention then has to be paid towards ensuring such a situation is created and maintained. The price system in this market-orientated approach is a peaceful and efficient method of co-ordinating activity, something which it does for millions of people (Friedman and Friedman, 1980:13). No single authority could guess what products consumers would want, and even less likely could they fix the price as any such decisions would be purely arbitrary. Gray (1989:34) argues this focus on private property rights is a prerequisite for personal liberty, as market freedom ensures autonomy and self-determination. It allows individuals to pursue their own ends in their own way.

The State's duty then is simply to sit back and umpire such activities, ensuring that all contracts are honoured and property rights protected (Nozick, 1974:297). It is this identification of freedom with contract and the right to choose which encapsulates the substance of this position and sets out its main criteria. Wealth is also created in a market economy and this theory suggests history reveals capitalism as the best system of social organisation. Friedman and Friedman (1980:309) argue that the amount of consumer goods and standard of living is far higher in free markets than in command economies. This is down to the encouragement of enterprise and the absence of

controls, conditions that together favour the flourishing of industry as well as the satisfaction of consumer demand.

Hayek (1960:41), meanwhile, explains that human progress is spontaneous and cannot be planned. Rather, it is the incentive to innovate that drives advancements and improves material existence as it provides producers with the edge to try out new ideas. These commentators agree competition functions as the engine of progress since it fosters an entrepreneurial spirit by encouraging producers to spot gaps in the market to uncover developments that would otherwise never have been conceived. The market then is a site of regulatory perfection where individual entitlements guarantee the preservation of liberty and the creation of a buoyant economy. From here the provision of consumer and social goods is delivered to a larger number of its people alongside greater employment prospects and wealth.

For television, these beliefs dictate a degree of reformulating to steer the latest development into directions that put the viewer in control. This perspective regards analogue television as being limited in its operations, held back by technological constraints, an inefficient industrial structure, a rigid and regressive philosophy and an underlying lack of ambition (Thatcher, 1993:634). Digitalisation has the potential to change this completely, permitting the medium to be responsive to audience needs so that broadcasters can tap into hidden markets and creative areas that only private endeavour can unearth. Importantly, the television market already has a wide customer base through its almost total household penetration. It is a logical progression then to expand on the number of economic activities television can sustain and utilise its ubiquity for economic purposes, a function that has not been exploited fully.

If it is desirable to have a free market in television, digital technology now renders this possible. Feintuck (1999:24) points out the essence of this reasoning when he observes that “digitalisation in television broadcasting means the final end to frequency scarcity, the most long-standing justification for regulation”. Through compression digital technology smashes scarcity and replaces it with an abundant supply. Doyle (2002:144) explains how digital technology will improve market structures by the lowering of production costs that will accompany cheaper

equipment. Such changes remove barriers to entry by making it economically feasible to produce content aimed at narrower audience segments. Therefore, the greater channel capacity means more suppliers would be able to enter the field of broadcasting to provide consumers with a greater range of choices and at the lowest possible prices.

Digital technology makes the medium into a two-way carrier system in which viewers can utilise the return path that interactivity offers to summon up programmes on payment of a charge (Curran and Seaton, 1991:334). Importantly, digital television has the capability to make direct payment possible through encryption, so individuals and broadcasters can be linked by a direct contractual agreement where services demanded equals direct charge through conditional access systems. *Narrowcasting* is the term commonly associated with this type of viewing as it enables smaller groups of viewers to dovetail their viewing choices more accurately in line with their preferences (Foster, 2002:126).

Commentators point out the fairness of this system as it forges a market relationship between viewers and broadcasters (Veljanovski, 1989:18). Over time, television would become more akin to the magazine market, offering a sort of electronic publishing that is closer to the model of the free press (McQueen, 1998:221). Channels are to be paid for by subscription and only those that are financially viable by providing something which consumers want will thrive. Television can also provide an entry-point to a whole communicopia of goods and services to be browsed and bought at will through home shopping (Gates, 1996:187). Again, it is from its position of being in the domestic home that allows television to serve consumers directly, and this it does by allowing them to utilise the increased functions of the medium to meet their individual information and consumer needs.

This perspective advances that competition compels broadcasters to direct their efforts towards capturing the interests of viewers. Such rivalry has the effect of bringing about new forms of output and suppliers, as well as encouraging change amongst incumbents who would otherwise sit comfortably aloof from the audience that they are meant to serve. Any regulation should be confined to ensuring enterprise

is maintained, keeping open the market for newcomers so that supply is always contested (Gibbons, 1998a:204). The assumptions are spelt out in detail below:

Competition policy has traditionally worked on the assumption that the efficiency of markets depend directly on their competitive structure, and especially on the extent of seller concentration. So, competition policy may involve 'structural' intervention - i.e. attempts to bring about market structures which are less concentrated, - on the assumption that this will ensure good behaviour by competing firms and promote improved industrial performance (Doyle, 2002:168).

The minimal, yet strong degree of regulation must aim to prevent the abuse of market position that could be exerted by incumbents, whereby distortions and unfair practises can lead to a dominant market share. Bill Gates (1996:207) concedes that even within such a functioning market small dislocations are probable given the significant change from the previous system. This is why a limited amount of disciplined, 'light touch' regulation is needed to provide a safety net for the interests of consumers.

Economic theory outlines how the competitiveness of an industry relies on each individual firm having only a small degree of market power (Johansson, 1991:44). The aim of competition law is thus to increase the number of players in the field and create conditions under which freedom of entry is protected and corrective measures should concentration take root. Such legislation can also prevent any tendency towards editorial uniformity and/or to accurate reporting amongst media firms that dominant share could lead to (Gibbons, 1998a:204; Beesley, 1996:2). Purnell (2001:80) points out a further reason for the withdrawal of State activity from broadcasting in that it no longer needs to contract with broadcasters. Instead, broadcasters can establish direct lines of contact with the operators of distribution systems. Thus, competition law is judged the best safeguard for the public interest because it intervenes on behalf of consumers and has their welfare as its ultimate objective. The Government's role in broadcasting, as Libertarian theory advances for society in general, is to police the contracts between suppliers and individuals, as well as those between distributors and broadcasters.

The only other form of regulation would be more general universal service obligations to ensure that all can participate in the information economy and benefit

from the advantages it offers (Hughes, 2000:41). This means widening access and overcoming technical and income barriers that inhibit certain people's chances of participation. Otherwise, the State has only to let the market decide the type of services available and their corresponding prices. The industrial functions of television are furthered if the medium operates in a transnational market like other consumer goods and digital technology makes it easier to penetrate global spheres of trade owing to its wider reach. Should British broadcasters engage within an international system it offers far more possibilities for wealth accumulation and the greatest number of choices for consumers. The challenge is to be at the centre of this international system through offering the most innovative information services, exporting the best hardware equipment and making popular programmes that can circulate in foreign markets.

Some writers point out how the U.K can greatly benefit by taking advantage of the international reach of the British language (Collins and Murrioni, 1996:12; Congdon et al, 1992:XXI). British programming has traditionally done well with international audiences and digital offers a suitable distributive platform to exploit its renown. Thomas (1999:62) sums up the rationale behind this approach by claiming that "regulatory policies which promote industrial development will result in better services for consumers and long-term benefits for the country". The recognised fact of television as an economic, as well as a cultural, resource has therefore to be accompanied by a more flexible, looser regime of international regulation within which private endeavour can thrive. Correspondingly, the take-up of digital television has to be encouraged so that switch-over can occur as quickly as possible not only for the greater range of services it brings, but also for permitting the Government to sell-off the analogue frequencies to generate extra finance (Lipsey, 2001:59).

This position advances that the economic surplus generated should allow television to function independently as a business model that can sustain itself. Success through satisfying audience demand would help to create a more vibrant sector by freeing up more cash for further innovations, and creating new markets from which a myriad of employment opportunities would emerge (Gates, 1996:287). Doyle (2002:77) explains how direct payments in the fledgling pay-tv market have enabled broadcasters to tap into a consumer surplus of those choices viewers are willing to pay

extra for by taking advantage of the higher intensity of their preferences. She goes on to demonstrate how sport in particular has provided examples of this and has made it feasible to target narrow audience segments extending the diversity of content. Such thematic narrowcasting involves specialisation and differentiation between audience groups according to tastes and interests (ibid.).

Libertarians regard direct payments as a fair method of finance, but also one that is more receptive to individual demand. They feel such changes have been responsible for the encouraging shifts in television that have widened the amount of content and provided specialist areas. The vision, in time, is of a vast centralised pool from which individuals would be able to draw their own information goods for which they would be incurred a charge. In this way, digital is better able to fulfil the wants and demands of the consumer, whom it significantly empowers by taking authority away from the schedulers (Griffiths, 2004).

The fundamental principles of this position resonate because they were the motor behind the structural reform instituted by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980's that sought to preserve consumer sovereignty as documented in Chapter Three. Television was partly deregulated and internationalised as the reformers attempted to approximate the consumer ideal of perfect competition. Negrine (1994:182) explains that the intention was to redesign television around an industrial strategy. The reasoning was that the communications sector offered immense possibilities to the economic health of the nation from which better material conditions associated with wealth accumulation and employment prospects could be derived. Leadbetter (2000:112) argues that the rate of economic growth is driven by the ability to innovate in the new knowledge economy. Ideas, skills and creative nous are the keys to success and television is one such area where this is particularly applicable. Thus, moulding the structures of broadcasting around the needs of viewers would safeguard audience need by providing new types of programming and broadcast services that only the discovery mechanism of the market could uncover at the same time as boosting economic turnover.

Such thinking surfaced in the Peacock Committee's report into the future of broadcasting. The main recommendations were for a piecemeal movement towards a

free market where the method of finance would move from the universal licence fee, gravitating to a subscription phase and culminating in a fully operational free market characterised by pay-per-view (Home Office, 1986:134). Legislation like the 1990 Broadcasting Act set out to do this and earlier 'new' technologies of distribution were the first attempts in creating the model of perfect competition. The significance of such technological and legislative measures is that they allow the viewer influence over what is supplied so that they are fully empowered (Sawers, 1996:83). Digital technology represents the final phase of this restructuring project and extension of some of the benefits engendered by cable and satellite technologies.

This viewpoint does not dismiss the importance of communication, but instead sees it as too vital to be left organised in the wrong way. One of its most ardent supporters, Samuel Brittan, explains the reasoning:

It is precisely because we are not dealing with baked beans or package holidays but with the communication of ideas and the dissemination and analysis of news and artistic endeavour, that freedom of entry by producers and freedom of choice by consumers to the maximum feasible extent are so vital (Brittan, 1989:28).

Communication is an essential ingredient of a democracy and it is argued, has to be organised freely if it is to make a meaningful contribution to society. The problem with a State-centred system of communication is its inability to establish a critical distance from those who it should be reporting on because of the financial dependency between them (Boulton, 1991:5). *Laissez faire* avoids this by charging customers and also protects diversity in programming given that various suppliers will target different parts of the audience in the attempt to establish a niche. The only offerings that will survive in such a system are those that are successful as they have popular audience support. As Sawers (1996:89) points out "support and disinterest are quickly translated into revenue gained and lost".

Public service broadcasting has an extremely untenable position in this vision of the future largely because it is a relic of the past and no longer needed or in fact justifiable in an era of plenty. More channels and fierce competition hold that a doctrine centred on a narrow set of values cannot be the sole purpose of this

technology. The reasons are outlined by Curran and Seaton: it is unresponsive to popular demand since it is administered by a small elite; it is vulnerable to Government pressure because of the arrangement of its finances and it costs too much owing to trade union exploitation (1991:337-340). No longer can it be advanced by an appeal to an ideological sense of improvement as broadcasting has now assumed a vastly different role in a changed society. This viewpoint contends that such regulation is a form of censorship as it seeks to control individuals and contravenes the idea of an open society (Negrine, 1994:34). Television should now be about serving individuals not imposing ways of thinking upon them (Sawers, 1996:83).

Further problems with regulation are that it stifles creativity by imposing limitations on programme-makers, rather than allowing them to experiment. Dahlgren (2000b:26) summarises the arguments by stressing that in a free market producers enjoy a creative freedom, and the only constraint is the audience to whom they are entirely responsible. Free marketers feel it is the profit motive that steers producers to new ideas (Veljanovski, 2001:113) and it is this that can discover more revenue streams together with unchartered markets that will aid the roll-out of the technology as well as the ultimate utility of consumers and industrial benefits. Regulation has less validity also because of the way television can be consumed can differ from person to person (Levy, 1999:144). The fact that digital technology makes extensive use of the return path enables consumers to customise their own schedules and even construct their own narratives, thereby rendering prescriptive regulatory directives on what to watch as redundant. In the same way that the magazine market is subject to general laws of blasphemy, sedition, defamation and libel, broadcasting should be similarly governed by such minimal rules (Brittan, 1989:49).

The licence fee is similarly redundant in the new circumstances and no longer sustainable in an era of direct payment. Boulton (1991:6) sums up its problems in that it is regressive given that it taxes the poor proportionately more than the rich. It is also unfair since it takes no account of whether viewers watch the programmes they are being charged for. Moreover, it is also inefficient and difficult to enforce. The Peacock Report (Home Office, 1986:47) identified further problems with this method: it is expensive to administer; encourages evasion and implies a degree of political control. Sawers (1996:98) regards the expectation of its payment unfair if viewers are

paying via other methods, particularly as those charges correlate exactly with a service explicitly demanded and then received. Just as the magazine market depends upon the financial viability of each publication, channels should be left to compete for audience share to determine how well they will survive (Purnell, 2001:81).

Advertising too would have a reduced role in such a system as the relationship between consumers and broadcasters can be direct (Thomas, 1999:12). A television system based on advertising concentrates on attracting higher ratings to generate higher advertising yield ignoring minorities in the process (Curran and Seaton, 1991:338). The current system has advertisers mediating between suppliers and producers so that the possibility exists for them to exert an influence on content, a prospect that direct payments avoids altogether².

Rupert Murdoch (1989) signalled his opposition to public service broadcasting in a landmark speech, denouncing it as an economically inefficient, paternalistic and unaccountable anachronism. In doing so, he felt it militated against choice to stifle progress to such an extent that its consequences for British television have been debilitating (Franklin, 2001:38). Its justification of being in the 'public interest' is a claim the Sky boss questioned vehemently, arguing that there can be no universally agreeable standard of quality (Murdoch, 1989). He continued that "much of what is claimed to be quality television here is nothing more than the parading of the prejudices and interests of the like-minded people who currently control British television" (ibid.). In fact, he argued that it is the BBC which obscures fairness and creative endeavour in broadcasting and needs reform. Sawers (1996:96) illustrates how it is the biggest barrier to entry for new firms because it controls 40% of the broadcasting market. Thus, the BBC is an obstacle to new entrants who could develop a wide range of new services. Beesley (1996:24) explains how its subsidised activities represent opportunities for price-cutting to the detriment of competition.

Critics also point out how the BBC is engaged in commercial activities and that its programming is increasingly difficult to differentiate from other broadcasters (Veljanovski, 2001:115; Griffiths, 2004). These commentators feel the BBC should

² This would mean phasing out advertising in the long-term as envisaged by the Peacock Report (Home Office, 1986:134).

be privatised and brought into the market on a level footing, allowing others the fair chance to compete for audience share. Indeed, this is not the end for the Corporation, but rather an end to the privileges it has enjoyed for so long regardless of how it serves audiences. The BBC can thrive in the new digital era in the same way as any other broadcaster can by capturing viewers through offering the most innovative and compelling goods and services. In fact, with its (for now) guaranteed income, vast archive and brand name it has more opportunities than most to succeed in the multi-channel future. To do so with the licence fee at the same time as following strict content rules extends far beyond reasonable expectation. The Peacock Report's stipulations for a free market in television were predicated on four provisos: freedom of entry for broadcasters; the ability of viewers to register the intensity of their preferences through a direct pay system; common carrier obligations on the means of transmission and measures to deal with monopolistic tendencies (Home Office, 1986:150). All of these stipulations can now be met through digitalisation and careful, yet minimal policy.

This viewpoint is therefore the realisation of an earlier vision concerning the multi-channel future. Steemers (1998a:2) explains how with a common technological infrastructure, television can become a random access medium, being an entry-point to a whole communications sector. The degree of its blending with computing and telecommunications will be sorted out over time through consumer decisions, as explained below:

It is the imagination of users operating in a free market that allows an industry to thrive. Technological innovation can make quick quantum or paradigm leaps, thereby accelerating wealth creation, enhancing individual liberty and improving the standards of material and spiritual living (Matson, 1996:59).

Chapter Three revealed how television has made quantum leaps previously and free marketers feel that it was contestation of audience share that pushed the incumbents into improving their wares. The BBC's initial programming policies for both radio and television were vastly removed from audience needs and only bought into line with some form of competition. Recent history illuminates how new players such as BSkyB have introduced a dynamism and energy to British broadcasting that has resulted in many innovations. Collins and Murrone (1996:12) explain how

liberalisation has created a large number of innovatory new firms at various levels in the communications sector as well as revivifying incumbents.

The key theme of openness this position continually stresses is especially pertinent in capturing the full benefits of convergence. Levy (1999:123) explains how technological change has been invoked as the justification for the liberalisation of the entire communications sector and the replacement of national broadcasting regulation with a new light-touch fused regulatory framework operating at international level. Chapter Three explained how content is now interchangeable across any platform, a prospect which raises the possibility of subjecting it to the same rules, regardless of the industrial origin. The Government must remove any impediments to the free flow of capital in the creative industries such as the prevention of cross-media ownership and foreign investment, together with restrictions on how businesses should be run and the content they may offer (Stelzer, 2001:43).

The degree and possibilities however of convergence cannot be predicted, particularly as this is the opening up of three markets, not just one. The Libertarian perspective does envisage a high degree of convergence whereby technical distinctions have been rubbed out to leave an enlarged information service (Matson, 1996:58). A converged regulatory framework ensures all content is subject to the same laws, rather than subjecting firms to multiple authorities that would be a drag on their activities, allowing them to gain from extending their activities into other areas (Levy, 1999:143). On these grounds Shew and Stelzer (1996:143) argue that the problem of cross-ownership constraints is that they stifle progress by curbing opportunities for firms to achieve the efficiencies of integration. Significantly, such stipulations inhibit the competitiveness of domestic firms by limiting their size so that they cannot compete with international firms who are not subject to such restrictions. Relaxing cross-ownership laws would be another measure to increase the competitiveness of the sector and accelerate convergence (Veljanovski, 2001:116).

Such a communications system has to remain open in a number of ways so that its full benefits accrue to the widest possible customer base. Any monopolisation of key gateways will render competition unfair and distort market processes and must be averted at all costs (Steemers, 1998b:106). Firms must be able to enter easily into

the communications industry and once in, find a particular niche to colonise. The sectoral and company alliances are more likely to generate diversity and opportunities for smaller operators according to Murdoch (1989). Entry costs are lower as any firm can enter into the common realm of the digital universe and find a level of audience demand. From these conditions unpredictability is certain to reign because it cannot be known where consumers would gravitate in such an unprecedented market.

It must be the case then that individuals be allowed to follow their own desires and transmit back to communication service providers that which they want according to this perspective. The spontaneity that free marketeers point to is therefore more acute and private initiative is the only way of tapping into unknown levels of demand for what are as yet undeveloped services. It is intuitively appealing to reward those companies and individuals that have the foresight and nous to satisfy individual wants (Griffiths, 2004). In the same way, regulation cannot prescribe what type of service ought to be provided. All it can do is to ensure the conditions for entry and progress are equally applicable to all and that no market distortions take place. It is imperative then that the regulatory framework is flexible and can adapt to changing circumstances to reflect the dynamism and changing nature of the communications sector (Thomas, 1999:68). Thus, the major decisions concerning the technologies development will be made by viewers themselves (Shew and Stelzer, 1996:110).

Overall then, this approach calls for policy makers and State authorities to move television away from a linear sender–receiver model of communication, defunct principles and outdated methods of finance by opening it up and unleashing its maximum potential by allowing viewers to decide what reaches them from an environment in which broadcasters vie with each other. Liberating television from its analogue and national confines by situating it within an international, cross-sectoral level playing field are the conditions that must be created to allow television to reach its optimum levels. This position identifies a connection between individual freedom and the wealth this creates when aggregated in a minimal system of organisation that is premised on political rights derived through economic freedom. Choice and sovereignty are the edicts of the new age, replacing the dogmas of elitism and paternalism that were specific to the historical conditions within which they were formulated. Digital technology enlarges the duties television can perform and

represents opportunities for the medium to espouse a different ideological creed, one more in tune with contemporary society of allowing individuals the freedom to select.

This theory holds that digital television means a new type of medium with the proliferation of channels and services, ultimately fusing with other media forms to create an information service that benefits consumers. Within this position the information society is constructed by the terms and conditions of market processes (Venturelli, 1998:128). The technology emits an ethos of individualism that the policy environment has to reflect and extend. While the exact shape remains to be seen, only the market can facilitate this direction by allowing viewers and broadcasters to interact through the technology where the important decisions will be made. There are a series of unpredictable changes that will take place in regards to consumer services and the programming that will become available. Digital television has a social purpose by contributing to people's cultural and material lives and a market-based approach is thought to speed up the transition towards the information society while making Britain a major player in a new high-tech global knowledge-based economy.

The Public Sphere

The concept of the public sphere, initially formulated by Jurgen Habermas, adopts a strong and prescriptive stance towards the role and operations of the media. At its core are a number of recurring themes around which the structure and operations of the media should be moulded. It is founded on a model of participatory democracy based on the Athenian Agora and is rooted in the liberal-pluralist belief of the universal rights of citizens. By stressing this principle of fundamental endowments its emphasis is on the need to involve citizens within the affairs of their nation-state. Its basic function is described below:

The primary task of the public sphere is to identify problems of common concern and provide room for their expression. This requires a fundamental connection between the public sphere and democratic procedures, in which the former detects and highlights matters of public interest that should then be fed into the procedures and deliberations of representative institutions and the state (Sassi, 2001:102).

As a fundamental institution for these purposes, the public sphere denotes a sense of abstract space, separate from both the State and the market, within which the free exchange and discussion of important matters of the day should take place.

It is an independent forum that is institutionally distinct where collective, rather than private interests are furthered. Its actual form is summed up in the following passage:

The public sphere comprises in essence the communicative institutions of a society, through which facts and opinions circulate, and by means of which a common stock of knowledge is built up as the basis for collective political action: in other words, the mass media which since the eighteenth century have evolved into the main source and focus of a society's shared experience (McNair, 1999:20).

This locale fulfils an essential democratic impulse in its nature of being autonomous from external forces, a factor that enables it to facilitate rational, open discussion on civic affairs. Such issues can then be fed directly into the political arena where their resolution can be formally instituted. Held (1980:260) argues that these features ensure that it is where reason, rather than tradition governs so that society's consensus can be conferred in an unrestricted and rational fashion.

The belief is that citizens have common interests and the system of communication should serve these because of its ability to foster the democratic will of a society. The communicative institutions determine what type of information is transmitted, how this is circulated and where it eventually reaches. The media must also serve the process of formal and informal control over Government, keeping a check on the activities of the State (Habermas, 1992:424). Curran (2002:233) explains that they do so by providing an arena of public debate, in the process reconstituting private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion. The concept of the public sphere is thus the embodiment of democratic thinking because it entails the key conceptual characteristics of an effective citizenry contributing to societal affairs on an equal footing. For Garnham (1986:43), the public sphere provides a normative framework to judge existing social arrangements and democratic practises. It can also be used to check how democratic the media are because it outlines certain civic values that the industry should adhere to.

Habermas begins his exploration of the public sphere as a historical exercise, with its formation contingent upon socio-political circumstances and a confluence of forces that together generated new forms of interaction within and between civil society in seventeenth century Europe. The absolute power of monarchy denied feudal society any degree of effective political discussion. Such authority was not subject to public scrutiny with the consequence that no significant degree of popular participation or accountability existed (Habermas, 1989:5). Capitalist relations were prime factors which created the environment for the Enlightenment, a process which would ultimately lead to the establishment of liberal democracies and more participatory forms of governance.

The first facet of change concerned the new commercial relations engendered by early capitalism. A market economy had grown out of the bounds of private domestic authority and from this emerged the bourgeoisie and new sites of interaction (Held, 1980:261). This fledgling social class of merchants questioned the Mercantilist belief in the defence of commercial practises, instead favouring free trade for industrial reasons, by identifying protectionist policies as unnecessary barriers towards innovation and wealth. The increased openness in trade and consequent traffic in commodities the growing bourgeois class initiated had distinct effects in spreading ideas across distance, and in extending the new social group committed to such endeavours (Habermas, 1994:89).

A unique series of institutions came about to further these ends and it was in the physical location of bars, salons and coffee houses that new ideas concerning the social formation were formulated which in themselves provided a basis for decisive political action. This was the public sphere in operation: private individuals congregating in an open space to discuss issues and devise plans for the governance of society. Outhwaite (1996:7) argues that this signified the birth of effective criticism and the ability of citizens to influence the direction of the State. Such bourgeois deliberations were motivated by the needs of early capitalism and also by how civil society could be improved, inciting counter ideas to the divine rights of monarchy that were to ultimately lead to more participatory forms of governance (Habermas, 1989:25). While trade fostered the new capitalist economies within which the

conditions for participatory discussion emerged, it is important to remember the political dimension the public sphere quickly acquired along with the social and cultural practises that nurtured it.

A free press developed out of these locations as firstly leaflets, then newspapers became written copy of the sentiments of the bourgeois participants in the public sphere. It is this 'fourth estate' that has earned itself a democratic reputation by scrutinising Government activities, storing and spreading ideas and setting forth a model of media performance that is committed to public objectives. Habermas (1992:87) explains that in this phase the press developed an 'explosive power' for its subversion. Print media was important not only because of the critical content it espoused, but that the media form which contained it overcame the dialogical constraints endemic within physical locations. Ideas could now be transported and spread to distant corners as news dispersed revolutionary fervour to a reading public separated by distance and even nationality.

Commentators point out how the free press was instrumental in engineering a new philosophy to dismantle old ways of thinking (Garnham, 2000:10). The print media then helped to establish new social relations as it translated the civic objectives of disparate groups into concrete forms of action that ultimately led to shifts in State policy and social change. Curran (1991:32) explains how such an historical analysis illuminates the method by which the independent press was central to the reconstitution of the public body because it was the critical organ of a public engaged in debate. On these grounds Smith (1973:36) feels journalism became the key agency in cementing together the new societies as it provided the mechanism for which truth could be gleaned through argument.

During the twentieth century television has become the prime institution of the public sphere and chief agency of social cement, as crucial to cultural life as the radical press was to the Enlightenment. Chapter One highlighted the medium's contribution to democratic life explaining how its technical characteristics and cultural primacy have endowed it with the ability to enlarge civic space. It also revealed several writers who use the framework of the public sphere for delineating and evaluating the operations of television (Scannell, 1992; Dahlgren, 1995; Gripsrud,

2000). Indeed, it has been pointed out that public sphere theory has had a central position in both media theory and practise (Van Gompel et al, 2002:200). To recap, television's reach, penetration, information supplying function and shared cultural reference points have given it a core centrality towards public life. It is through these capabilities that the principles of public sphere theory have provided a distinct model of public communication that have guided British television in terms of its programming, its industrial structure and the overarching regulatory framework.

Although its public functions have been well highlighted it should be pointed out that analogue television is limited to a one-way communication flow from sender to receiver. While civic material can be transmitted the possibilities for citizens to respond are limited. Digital television fits into and extends upon this public sphere framework and can therefore be seen as a significant element in the project of democratising society. The basic idea is that digitalisation increases the dimensions as well as the character of public space, bringing new information services to viewers, thus amplifying the civic qualities of analogue television. Such thinking is well demonstrated in the passage below:

New interactive media offer a communication platform the users can appropriate for various purposes – from entertainment to knowledge sharing. They thus empower users in ways that are hardly imaginable in broadcasting and other mass media (Kim and Sawhney, 2002:221).

The technology is empowering because of its ability to foster distinct types of communication, which in turn open up possibilities for new modes of interaction and it is these properties which are regarded as inherently democratic (Pearce, 1997:244).

The return path between the producers and consumers of broadcast material ensures that there will be a two-way level of communication between sender and receiver, which reconceptualises the relationship between the two. Indeed, the hierarchical flow of message transmission has been eroded as information can travel upstream towards media producers. Rather than utilise this linkage for a direct contractual relationship, although that too is not ruled out, its main function is to deliver a greater degree of civic power to the audience through the creation of a more responsive media system. This guarantees audiences an uninterrupted channel of

communication back to media producers enabling choice to be served directly. As with the neo-liberal view, the fundamental relationship between audience and scheduler is realigned, with power passing to the audience, as the scheduler has to meet their demands (Thompson, 2002:59).

The end of spectrum scarcity also means more channels that will result in different types of public spheres, catering for difference to bolster broadcastings traditional role of projecting unity. For instance, the opportunities for smaller, niche communities to connect will be enhanced. This point rehearses the neo-liberal position that more channels equals more choice so that individuals can gravitate towards their own needs, rather than struggle to find provision for themselves in a generalised broadcasting system³. Digital television caters towards smaller communities of interest so that specialist and local issues could be given greater coverage as sectional differences between individuals and issues are unravelled. In this way, educational, health and democratic services are all distinct possibilities with whole channels devoted to such matters (Stevenson, 2000:127).

Interactivity is the key democratic feature of new communications technologies on a number of grounds and has formed prominently on discourses around the unique properties of digital technology. Pearce (1997:244) explains that interactivity is by its very nature inherently subversive and thus brings power to ordinary people. It does so because there is far greater scope for individual involvement in the construction of broadcast material. Firstly, it has the capability to eliminate intermediaries as it bypasses the centre to constitute new communication channels, thereby weakening the power of the core (Kim and Sawhney, 2002:223). These new communication flows are from ordinary people, now empowered by the new technology which allows them to have their views fed back directly to the mainstream. Beesley (1996:7) echoes this by explaining how users are enfranchised in a two-way network as they can return their messages, a factor which undermines the control of a network because power does not simply emit from the centre outwards.

³ This is what Curran and Seaton (2003:284) call 'sphericules'.

The falling costs of the technology also mean that programme making would be possible for any one, which Graham (2002:69) considers the true democratisation of broadcasting. Less sophistication is required as any one with I.T literacy can construct and broadcast material and cheaper equipment should enable individuals to get involved in the production of material as well, enabling individual artistic expression. Audiences can select the stories and issues that concern them and even scrutinise Government activities via particular conduits, enabling anyone to be a journalist now. This makes ordinary individuals less reliant on the traditional mediating and agenda-setting role of journalists (Tsagarousianou, 1999:193). Over time, this should also mean non-institutionalised media become more prominent as non-professionals challenge established media institutions to increase the range of alternative views (Hargreaves, 2001:27). Rheingold's (1993:100) pioneering work shows how digital media have the ability to circumvent traditional media and should therefore bring about a greater diversity of information.

The new technology will provide an array of novel services to audiences that facilitate the circulation of information. The ancillary range of communicative tools that digitalisation introduces bring e-mail, a private communications tool, and web access, a distinctly public medium, to television. Through these increased capabilities television could be a channel for on-line voting. Additionally, it could provide actual services in these areas with linkages to public servants such as the doctor, teacher or MP. Importantly, it could provide information about public services and Government procurement bringing benefits to those who experience barriers to their involvement with the wider society (Bickerstaffe, 2001:106). The delivery of public services and Government activity such as transactions through the television set injects a public character into the private realm of the home, further increasing the medium's democratic qualities and helping its audience to exercise their citizenry rights. There exists then a clear connection between the medium's existing abilities of disseminating political material and the establishment of a forum for the examination of civic issues, together with a new series of activities that formally bring political activities into the home. The propensity for citizen's views to be fed back into the procedures of Government are considerably enhanced by this return path.

A growing body of academic work is starting to emerge on how Internet chatrooms are the new pockets for civic discussion (Rheingold, 1993; Dyson, 1998; Miller and Slater, 2000; Dodge and Kitchin, 2000). These works describe how the Internet has become a new site of public space in which unique modes of social interaction take place so that virtual communities take root. The newsgroups, chatrooms and bulletin boards function as sites for online communities for like-minded people to assemble and interact. Additionally, a number of researchers have investigated how far the Internet has been utilised as a direct channel between the Government and the people (Becker and Slaton, 2000; Ward and Gibson, 2000; Axford and Huggins, 2001).

Digital television would simply follow this model in that it too can be a civic device, offering a direct line of communication between governors and governed, buttressed with the range of communication tools associated with the Internet. In fact, where digital television actually provides Internet access the possibilities for civic discussion are considerably enhanced. Television is thus important not only for performing its own such tasks, which should increase once the technology becomes more widespread and more functions are added to it, but also for providing a gateway to the Internet itself.

Kim and Sawhney (2002: 218-221) explain how interactive television entails far more than what we understand as television, and as such signifies a paradigmatic shift in the medium. It offers a complete communications platform with various layers of communication which audiences can use to control the production and exchange of information enabling users to become listeners and speakers or consumers and producers. The multiple communicative channels convert television into something more akin to a comprehensive communications system because they extend in different ways the original broadcasting model of unidirectional information flow from sender to receiver. Importantly, new technologies permit *different* types of communication in that they enable both deliberation in the way of citizen-to-citizen communication as well as hearing, such as in citizen-to-authority communication (Tsagarousianou, 1999:195-196). That is, through particular tools, namely e-mail and discussion groups, individuals can speak with each other and authorities on any topic whatsoever, related to television or not. Thus, new types of information exchange

foster citizenship because they push open the frontiers of communication possibilities and enable greater engagement alongside a wider volume and range of information.

To realise the benefits the technology offers certain structural conditions need to be satisfied. Free markets are necessary to stimulate creativity and the circulation of ideas, as indeed they did in Enlightenment Europe, but this needs qualifying by the proviso that in broadcasting *laissez-faire* encounters severe problems. Like healthcare, information is too valuable to be left to the dynamics of the market. The special nature of broadcasting means conventional market rules cannot adequately regulate it. Public sphere theory has always had a close identification with public service broadcasting, and again this would act as a safety-net policy against the rampant commercialism of the last perspective.

Several writers stress how essential public service is as a broadcasting philosophy in order to keep television on a path of civic duties (Garnham, 1986; Kumar, 1986; Curran, 1991; Scannell, 1992; Murdock, 1992; Hood and Tabery-Peterssen, 1997; Purnell, 2001; Puttnam, 2001). They recognise that there is a tension between cultural and commercial objectives and advance public service as an attempt to ensure market forces do not distort programme making (Blumler, 1992:14). Commercial broadcasting is driven by economic logic and therefore aims for the biggest audience share in order to maximise advertising revenue. As such it has less of a civic duty to its audience and so the perceived threat is of commercial broadcasters compromising their objectivity in line with their economic interests. Another fear is that pursuit of profit encourages homogenised programming as broadcasters chase the same middle ground (Negrine, 1994:181). Public service operates as a corrective form of regulation to the shortcomings of the market largely because its goals are different and it is not financially dependent on audience numbers. Scannell's (1992:327) work reveals how it avoided these problems with its historical commitment to impartiality, political coverage and pioneering output.

For Andrew Graham (1999:19) public service broadcasting must be preserved for four main reasons: to guard against market failure; to cater for citizenship and community; to deepen democracy and finally, as an industrial strategy. Firstly, the size of the media market has magnified through internationalisation and the unifying

nature of the underlying technological infrastructure. Graham (ibid.24) demonstrates how market failure would be unavoidable if broadcasting were to be totally liberalised due to economies of scale and scope. These factors would generate larger industrial entities, as successful firms would swallow smaller ones, and are dangerous precedents given that concentration in ownership limits competition and reduces the number of voices in the industry (Curran, 2002:204). Public service also means broadcasters can experiment without commercial risk. Koboldt et al (1999:71) argue that it brings the types of programming that the market cannot, or dare not, provide while proponents point to Channel Four as an example of the innovative success of public service broadcasting (Graham, 2000:102). This shows how such broadcasters are liberated from the confines of market provision and able to take creative risks without fear of being tied to market rationale.

Secondly, as citizens we have certain rights including entitlements to core information (Murdock, 1992:20). The market makes no allowance for these or for the fact that as a body of citizens we have collective interests or even that we have a right to knowledge. It simply establishes the conditions for the exchange of information. Venturelli (1998:194) argues that the notion of public service broadcasting is entwined with that of citizenship as it secures citizens access to the raw information from which informed political choices can be made. It does so because universal service obligations are central to its remit as they ensure the benefits of the technology reach all. Siune and Hulten (1998:25) explain that its universality is public service broadcastings strength particularly as it is free at the point of use. This is especially important while broadcasting as a whole moves towards the pay-per-view model because it retains an impartial basic corpus of programming for all audience members, regardless of ability or willingness to pay.

Additionally, the types of programming public service is committed to reveals a democratic duty. Public service television has strived to make programmes that are in the public interest broadly defined as it is has been constructed to act as a public servant. By doing so, it is committed to civic ends and is able to preserve the canons of diversity and plurality, therefore effectively accommodating minority and sectional interests (Brants and De Bens, 2000:8). Murdock (1992:19) sums up this argument by

stressing how public service broadcasting works from an active notion of agency and it is this which ensures broadcasters have civic duties to their audience.

Thirdly, television must serve democratic purposes by providing the common knowledge where society learns about itself. The audience is a body of citizens and a community, rather than an atomised mass, and as such have common interests. There are certain issues that affect us at the collective, as opposed to the individual level, and the public nature of broadcasting is a method for achieving this. Indeed, public service broadcasting is rooted in some conception of the common good as it has been formulated on collectivist arguments (Barnett, 2000:155). These sentiments were of a national character and Scannell's (1992:323) research has illuminated how broadcasting created a national audience for events of societal importance where vast numbers of people could engage in the consumption of the same material, and in so doing, could understand they were part of a wider community. It established a new public audience based around national communities, for instance with sport, politics and entertainment.

Broadcasting then was crucial to national identity and consciousness as it was the method by which nationhood was projected to a public who could subsequently engage with such a notion. Chapter One highlighted how broadcasting has the status of a public good in that it can be provided at no extra cost to everyone and is not finite in the same way as something like food is. The greater the number of people involved within the consumption of its product does not encroach on anyone else's enjoyment of it. Thus, its civic role is enshrined as it takes advantage of its technological form to transmit a national character. The collectivism of public service, along with the inherent properties of broadcasting as a public good, enable television to espouse the virtues of national community so that the medium remains the domain for the resolution of social problems.

Finally, British television has earned itself a prestigious reputation globally with its high public service programming becoming popular with international audiences (Leadbetter, 2000:111). The BBC has flourished internationally with programme sales, co-productions and other associated spin-offs that have successfully captured a significant part of the global market. It seems reckless from a business

angle to surrender this competitive advantage when it has proved so economically beneficial. The task seems to be for public broadcasters to take advantage of their status in launching new, innovative routes to connect with the audiences that may also succeed financially. Overall, public service broadcasting ensures digital television will be committed to public precepts by attaching the conditions for civic discourse on to both the structure and form of television. This acts as a mechanism to retain broadcastings independence from both the State and the market, thereby permitting it to serve such ends. Graham (1999:36) concludes that public service broadcasting is therefore the only method of guaranteeing the public space within which society can engage with itself and must be preserved for these democratic reasons.

To sum up, digital technology offers a new beginning for civic involvement and is thought to engender another transformative epoch in civil society as the parameters of public space are reconfigured. Its implications for television are important for it enlarges both the volume and range of information as well as expanding on the number of functions the medium can provide. This perspective makes extensive use of the new technological powers digitalisation engenders to lay the ground for a more democratic society, positioning the technology as an emancipatory tool. It does so by bringing these benefits directly into the home so that a range of information services and a direct channel of communication can be most effectively exploited. It is these functions and placement which enhance its ability to serve as the institution for the public sphere in contemporary society.

The mixed economy regulatory model public sphere theory prescribes would guarantee broadcasters the creative freedom to experiment and profit through their endeavours, whilst safeguarding informative and innovative types of programming. Essentially, adopting a public sphere framework liberates television from the operations of the market, thereby enshrining its civic remit. Just as the radical press helped dismantle autocratic rule and analogue television prised open the horizons of knowledge, digital television could offer distinct forms of involvement that will enable citizens to become far more involved in their societies.

The paradigmatic shift in the medium should result in a corresponding realignment of social forms given the medium's cultural primacy along with the

complementary changes in the communications environment generally. The chief difference with the last perspective is that it defines human freedom in political rather than economic terms, identifying a fundamental tension between the two (Garnham, 1986:47). In doing so, it prioritises civic purposes in the technologies remit in addition to the wider policy environment. Thus, digitalisation heralds a historical transformation for civil society in a world brought closer together electronically by creating an era of digital citizenship within which knowledge is a fundamental right. Reason, understanding and critical rationality are enhanced as new ways for people to interact and discuss across greater geographical confines are made available, all of which should create a more deliberative community.

The Global Village

The work of Marshall McLuhan during the 1960's and 1970's was responsible for introducing the importance of the media to a wide audience. His position centred primarily on how social patterns throughout history have been defined by technologies which act upon human and societal behaviour (Rieder, 2000:97). His work explained how technology extends man's capabilities by adding to the critical faculties such that a new relationship with the geographical environment is subsequently established. Kroker (1997:97) proposes that humankind inhabits a mediated environment of the technostructure through which individuals experience the world. The way each medium engages with us is different and its level of interaction has particular effects. It is in the properties of the technology itself that the social impact can be understood, captured by the now famous assertion that 'the medium is the message' (McLuhan, 1964:3). The media is therefore a tool with which we can engage with society and its innate properties dictate the manner in which we do that. This focus on the form, rather than the content, emphasises McLuhan as a medium theorist whereby he attributes a determinacy to technologies in their abilities to change society (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997:274).

In his discussion of history, McLuhan (1964:5) identified specific periods in which human activity was defined by the technological means to support it. For instance, the tribal culture of early man was characterised by the spoken word and the

wheel, both of which imposed their own limitations in terms of interaction and control of the surroundings. The oral culture these gave rise to was instant, immediate and collective (Waters, 1995:34). This perspective advances that it is the technology which is available to society that defines how people can interact with each other and their environment. On these grounds, Danesi (2002:35) argues that the history of the media illuminates how any major change in the way information is represented and transmitted brings about a concomitant shift in cultural systems.

This period of oral culture was followed by industrialisation, where the printed word and mechanisation formulated new frameworks of interaction. McLuhan (1964:8) attributed this to the printing press, a technology of considerable power from the way it changed society, spread knowledge and the overthrow of despotic regimes. As well as its social effect, each media has its own logic in terms of its use of how individuals can engage with it, characterised by the distinction between hot and cold technologies. McLuhan defined the printed word as a hot medium owing to the requirement of total concentration on the part of the individual, contrasting with the cool status of television given that it is less full of information, allowing greater sensory participation (McLuhan and Zingrone, 1995:3).

McLuhan was writing at a time when he believed society was on the cusp of another massive shift in cultural consumption with the predominance of electronic communication such as television and radio. The key characteristic of electronic media, and that which defines them away from other types of media that preceded them, is speed (McLuhan and Powers, 1989:121). The way television conveys information is more important than the actual content it disseminates as its delivery system instils a unique cultural form distinct from the linearities of print. Television is a more chaotic medium and the manner we interact with it immerses us totally with an almost hypnotic intensity (Levinson, 1999:9). The instantaneous nature of communication means it drags locations and events together, compressing time and space in such a style that they are no longer constraints on human understanding.

This means that television acts as a complete perceptual field by saturating society with sounds and images from distant places (Murphie and Potts, 2003:14). This contrasts with the linearity of print and by doing so, enables new forms of

interaction. Electronic media disengage people from their physical environment, transposing them into a sphere of no boundaries (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967:121). Its properties bring about 'cultural implosion' as various aspects of human experience are brought together for all to share. This scenario is labelled as the 'global village' since it "produces a field of simultaneity where everybody gets in touch with everybody else" (McLuhan and Powers, 1989:94). Electronic communications allow people to converse more easily and by being in touch with each other new forms of understanding will emerge.

Lash (2002:176) explains that it is the transportation properties that directs technologies towards full integration into our everyday lives. Through this they offer culture at a distance, subsequently increasing the human sensorium:

Once upon a time, denizens of the local village had more or less equal access to all public information – the voice of the town crier reached everyone. Print greatly expanded the reach of information – creating the first mass audiences, the first fast, big publics beyond eyesight and earshot - but also shattered the simultaneity of the original, acoustic village crowd...Enter radio, and then television: every-one sitting in their living rooms around the country hears the voice, sees the face of the speaker of news, at the same time. The village has been reconstituted...close enough to make the global village ring true as an effect of broadcast media (Levinson, 1999:66).

It is possible to apprehend the world as a whole and consequently, a consciousness of the human society in its entirety is unavoidable. The actual technology of electronic communication leads to an exteriorising of the human nervous system by establishing a network assemblage analogous to the human one (Waters, 1995:35). Fidler (1997:119) demonstrates that this involves the translation of aspects of village life onto a global scale, namely the telling of stories. A world council and direct democracy are ultimate end points of this vision, attainable because the limitations of time and space are overcome. Electronic media unify because of the collective methods of engaging and perceiving the world, sealing the entire human tribe into a global family (McLuhan and Zingrone, 1995:104).

This framework has been invoked to demystify digital technology and explain its logic and importance. As Hale (1996:26), an eminent popular author on new media declares "in the whirl of the digital revolution, the media pundit [McLuhan] has

become electronic culture's immortal saint". The belief is that McLuhan correctly envisaged the series of inevitable conditions that are presently unfolding, driven by the enabling power of digital technology, such that the world is shrinking to signal a new epoch in human understanding. Many writers observe the characteristics of the new technology to extrapolate its likely impact on society. In his discussion of McLuhan, Kroker (1997:90) argues that the era of electronic circuitry represents a break point in human experience as it heralds the end of the visual uniform culture based on mechanised technologies and the ushering in of a popular culture of the new man which would be fully tribal and organic. This reference to the 'new man' advances that humanity is entering into a more peaceful era because the ability to communicate is thought to signal a change within the human condition as people will be able to co-operate with each other more openly and effectively. On this basis, Cairncross (2001:16) claims that the death of distance new communications technologies engender make the world a better place as the global diffusion of knowledge crystallises new means of understanding and agreement. Gilder (2000:261) explains they are the guarantor of freedom as they reach many disparate people with new ideas, eroding the power of despots by increasing the information flow and with it the principles of liberal democracy. Gates (1996:299) too finds liberating potential in it as the information proliferation makes it increasingly difficult for Governments to control what their citizens receive.

The sharing of cultural values as the world opens up means there will be more shared global experiences that cement unique forms of understanding. These commentators have no doubt that the democratic structure strengthens as the emerging communication system means opposition cannot be silenced, showing people other ideas and ways of life. All converge on the optimistic belief new communications technologies are harmonising because they break down geographical and cultural boundaries, echoing McLuhan's earlier prophecies:

Earth in the next century will have its collective consciousness lifted off the planet's surface into a dense electronic symphony where all nations – if they still exist as separate entities – may live in a clutch of spontaneous synthesis, painfully aware of the triumphs and wounds of one another (McLuhan and Powers, 1989:95).

For Negroponte (1995:229), the digital age has four powerful components that cannot be denied or stopped: decentralising, globalising, harmonising and empowering. Power is dispersed as more people have access to information, individuals are brought the benefits of instant communication and information services so that new forms of understanding develop when people are connected. This is why the technology makes the world a better place.

Culture is in the process of being globalised through the power of communications technologies and undergoes a radical change too. The increasing international reach of television binds people together through the content it disseminates as television has the ability to address and serve international audiences. Lash (2002:183) explains that the contemporary electronic communities break with every aspect of national and imagined communities as they are global and hence characterised by a nomadic movement of tribal and global cultures. Technology, politics and economic systems are all characteristics of the forces of globalisation and the new order that thinkers like McLuhan label as a momentous shift. The interconnectedness of disparate places into an overall network means that events in one locality have ramifications elsewhere. Leadbetter (2002:31) argues that globalisation is an exciting, open and legitimate process as it projects a diversity of local cultures onto the world stage, thereby enabling poorer countries to develop. It should be perceived then as an opportunity to thrive and get heard. The chief task then is to create conditions under which the technology can actively fulfil its potential of uniting people. Raboy (1996:5) feels that such patterns illustrate how global issues now require global solutions and because of this broadcasting has to reposition itself in order to fulfil its historically defined cultural role.

Some writers concern themselves with the manner in which television symbolises globalisation. Many of these commentators find that the medium may need realigning in certain respects to encourage the benefits of this process. Keane (2000:72) argues that while the spatial frameworks of national communications are in upheaval the notion of a territorially bound citizenry is obsolete. People are in fact enmeshed in discussions across continents as global issues pervade all aspects of citizen's lives. The feelings of belonging are thus no longer as rigidly territorial as they once were and the media should reflect this. Barker (1997:229) takes up this

point by advancing that globalisation demands the extension of democratic activity by forging transnational institutions and activities. Television can contribute to this process of dialogue across States by developing a plural public space thereby bringing into focus a multiplicity of voices.

Raboy (1996:14) goes one stage further by advancing how the notion of public service broadcasting has to be reconfigured to encompass the global nature of life in the twenty-first century. He argues that the requirement is for public service to refocus itself towards a new public culture that is global in scope, indicative of the new identities that are emerging, rather than being tied to a conception of 'the nation'. All of this demonstrates the shift to a new media ecology, reflective of a different cultural system in which television is as global as other areas, such as politics and economics.

Television is therefore one reference point, albeit a highly significant one, for the multifaceted change in today's world. Barker (1997:6) explains that it is a constitutive element and consequence of globalisation largely because it is transnational in scope and able to operate across the boundaries of several nation-states. The implications for television are profound in that the medium will increase in scope and power in terms of how it acts upon the human sensorium and subsequently society. The logic is spelt out below:

TV has turned out to be *the* technological invention that has consolidated McLuhan's global village, because it has made the same pattern and kind of distraction (the same TV sitcoms, adventure programmes, and variety shows) available across the globe (Danesi, 2002:12; italics in original).

Digital television is an integral part of this revolution even though most of these contemporary writers following McLuhan address their ideas towards the Internet. As a medium, television has been steadily moving away from a territorially bound national system of broadcasting for some time towards a new paradigm of international crossover. Digital technology offers it that possibility, along with the earlier innovations of cable and satellite, to penetrate further and open up new markets, because its storage facilities are greater than analogue television. With more information to convey, the likelihood of foreign programming increases. Barker (1997:21) outlines how the medium stands at the centre of consumer capitalism and

hence follows the logic towards a global market that is being established towards those ends. It is in the ability to operate across boundaries of nation-states that television is having to negotiate a new identity for itself away from its national dimension that it was originally conceived within.

In its role as a global entity, Cairncross (2001:62) demonstrates how television constitutes a durable communal bond with the shared cultural experience of programmes, bringing new ideas to those who live in countries with State controlled broadcasting systems. The question remains of what happens to television in the intervening period before globalisation is fully attained. The transitional phase will see television change as it moves from national to global, analogue to digital and scarcity to abundance. Fidler (1997:191) outlines the issues here by stating that while the general movement towards McLuhan's global village is underway, attention needs to be paid to establishing uniformity in technological standards and policies to govern the information flow, all of which may require decades to sort out. So, while particular issues will need to be addressed and resolved, there are still certain outcomes we should expect. One such scenario is highlighted here:

Broadcasters are being catapulted from a largely feudal national structure into a global competitive marketplace. When we look back on this digital revolution from the perspective of more than a few decades, it will be seen to have been as significant as the shift from the age of steam to the age of electricity. And the concept of national broadcasting and a pre-determined schedule of programmes to the entire nation will be an idea as quaint as the *Flying Scotsman* (Graham, 2002:70; italics in original).

The task then is to ensure the creation of conditions that facilitate this process. Mather (2000:51) sums up the arguments by advancing that the new circumstances of globalisation of delivery should be accompanied by the evaporation of traditional regulation. Where technology enables television to cross borders it makes less sense to subject it to more forms of regulation and replace these with a looser, overall framework that encourages firms a wider market to the benefit of consumers everywhere. Sacks (2001:144) meanwhile, explains how MTV illustrates that there is a common bond within the global audience and that huge benefits await for those broadcasters who discover it. Programmes and ideas circulate the world over so that audiences everywhere are familiar with a whole panoply of beliefs and ideas. Fidler

(1997:100) documents how there is an electronic news blanket that covers the Earth now, providing up-to-date information to all. Sinclair et al (1996:4) point out how STAR TV, the pan Asian satellite service reaches into territories traditionally heavily controlled and in doing so, exposes those audiences to diverse sources of information. All of this certainly constitutes an improvement on a territorially bound media system where the information flow is curtailed and limited.

There are also a number of increasingly transnational initiatives regarding television, many of which see the information society as a global project. 'Television Without Frontiers' is one such example. Gibbons (1998a:16) details how this EU directive was formulated to promote the competition and culture of European countries to enable them to compete on a global basis. Television can contribute to this with the removal of trade barriers and other unnecessary obstacles that obscure the logic it holds. The globalisation of television has in fact lead to the hetrogenization of culture because it provides a platform for the expression to peripheral cultures from which audiences can see and learn a lot more (Sinclair et al, 1996:13). The other dimension to this process is the economic aspects of the transnational spread of television. Commentators agree that the ultimate vision is of a vast, global market—place in which consumers can purchase any information products (and other non-perishable goods) from the electronic apparatus television will by then have mutated into.

It is this system of 'friction-free' capitalism whereby the global traffic of goods, competitively provided, will serve the largest consumer base possible to ensure audiences are served foremost (Gates, 1996:181). In many ways then this position is an extension of the Libertarian viewpoint as it is grounded on the belief that information flow and movement is to be encouraged. That it does this on a global scale with the ancillary implications of cultural integration is down to the powers it endows digital technology and the understanding that this impacts directly on society with a revolutionary effect.

Stelzer (2001:37) argues broadcasting companies now compete in a world market, so only those that adopt the latest innovations and ensure the rapid diffusion to aid productivity and prosperity will increase the living standards of their nation's

citizens. Firms have to reposition themselves out of the national context and into the international marketplace and in doing so may have to change their composition in order to gain leverage amidst the competition. Companies must have the size and scale to operate on a global stage (Shooshan and Cave, 2000:75). Large, multinational firms emerge as major players and drivers of the technology as they have the market power to hop borders. Cross promotion, joint ventures, co-financing, co-productions and mergers are all such activities that signal the global nature of television.

Many theorists also envisage a high degree of convergence with digital technology bringing more functions to television so that it blends with the computer to form a grand information source, replete with the information services this process brings (Negroponte, 1995; Gates, 1996; Gilder, 2002). It is these improvements, such as the greater number of channels, more data services and home shopping, that further extend the human reach and endow greater control. These theorists believe the qualities digital technologies offer fundamentally better the human race as they create new means with which to co-operate and exist.

McLuhan's ideas on the social impact of communications technology have found considerable currency with contemporary thinking on the patterned effects digital television will exert to the extent that he has been declared the doyen of the digital age and a great visionary prophet (Hale, 1006:26). His approach observes the social environment the media helps to create and how these conditions facilitate certain types of action (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997:275). Communications technologies have to be conceived in terms of progress and observing their logic highlights how emancipatory they will be, alongside the levelling effect of providing information to all. The thinking is that because new communications technologies can engender change on a global scale, they will. Thus, we are entering into a new era of global activity in which television is a focal point for the structuring effects of globalisation, but one that contributes to and exacerbates that process.

The world culture new communications technologies propel may not be unitary but will nevertheless be much more in touch with the widest aspects of its complement bringing marginalised people into the mainstream (Leadbetter, 2002:32). It is because of this that the globe shrinks and new forms of understanding develop,

resonating with the tribalism McLuhan envisaged. Levinson sums up the cultural effect this position advances by stating that “in the new digital global village, there are no barbarians” (1999:203). Television, or whatever it will eventually become, is an integral component of globalisation and one that both symbolises and drives the process. Digital television compresses the globe and puts communication into a new mode, weaving change across the social fabric as it forcefully advances. To comprehend digital technology then is to prepare for an epochal shift in society and expansion of the human condition. This technology is the driving force to a new beginning because embedded within it are creative qualities that enlarge our human capacities and worldly capabilities (Rieder, 2000:97).

Risk

Risk has become a major sociological area since a seminal piece by Ulrich Beck (1992) on its prevalence and pertinence in the modern world. Its main tenets are that contemporary life is characterised by a series of hazards and mishaps, real and imagined, that have a special bearing on the social fabric and the conduct of life (Beck, 1992; Beck, 1994; Beck, 1995; Beck, 1998; Beck, 2000; Luhmann, 1993; Giddens, 1998; Scott, 2000; van Loon, 2002). These works offer an all encompassing socially scientific framework on the centrality of risks to the changes in societies from modern to the present situation which they label as late modern. Beck explains how such a state of affairs has come about:

Risk society begins where nature ends...where we switch the focus of our anxieties from what nature can do to us to what we have done to nature...Risk society begins where tradition ends, when, in all spheres of life, we can no longer take traditional certainties for granted. The less we rely on traditional securities, the more risks we have to negotiate. The more risks, the more decisions and choices we have to make (1998:10).

This represents a considerable break from traditional forms of association where life was patterned in orderly ways so that individuals understood who they were and what was expected of them. Such settled modes of existence have been disrupted by the presence and character of risks which permeate all aspects of social life. Adams (1995:21) observes how risk has entered many different fields and comes in various

forms – economic, political, physical, social, ecological, sexual and so on. There is therefore no escape from risk, and the threat it poses causes us to continually modify our actions in relation to it.

Risks are generated by the imperatives of capitalism and constitute the radical edge of modernity in that they are by-products of the system of production (Beck, 1994:3). Industrial society was typified by processes of standardisation that met the material needs of individuals. Modern society though experiences a multitude of risks that accompany the production of wealth and it is the existence of these ‘bads’ which cause confusion and complexity (Lash, 2002:150). Ecological catastrophes, pollution and other man made hazards force society into a position of constant caution. As van Loon (2002:14) observes “risk society is the constellation of forces which propel industrial society into disarray”. Subsequent transformations in thought and action brought about by these elements impinge upon the foundations of society in a fundamental manner. Beck (1994:3) labels this a ‘reflexive modernity’ in that risks effect how society acts upon itself, and in doing so, dissolves the contours of industrial society, disembedding previously established social forces. Risk is the consequence of modernisation and a technologically rich society that is perpetually saddled with its uncertain presence, forcing realignment in social and political practises in the attempt to counter it.

The side effects of the production process place society into a state of anticipation and cause its institutions to be on the lookout for these threatening trends. Questions of how persistent dangers are to be anticipated, negotiated and eradicated pervade all aspects of life. It is not simply the threat these risks assume, but the belief in their existence that defines contemporary society in terms of uncertainty (Adams, 1995:180). While society had to deal with hazards in previous epochs, certain features mark the distinctiveness and potency of contemporary risks. They are man-made, globally enveloping dangers, such as environmental disaster, the contamination of food, biotechnology, terrorism and the nuclear question that impinge on all individuals, largely because they threaten the destruction of the whole planet.

Lupton (1999:59) argues that because of this the central problem in today’s world is the prevention of risk, forcing society to adapt itself at many different levels

for the perpetual perils that exist, or are thought to exist. Giddens (1998:27) surmises that the idea of risk is bound up with the attempt to control the future. For Governments, the control of various risks comprises their chief aim in order to bring a degree of stability to society. To remove that which is unknown however constitutes a severe sense of consternation, as there is no certainty about what can affect us, and when and where it will strike. Beck (2000:217) claims risks are incalculable and unpredictable in this type of society, so that any forecast is purely the domain of guesswork such is their randomness.

This theory has been used to explain the current changes that digitalisation has engendered onto the communications field, whereby the certainties and order of the analogue age are destabilised and disrupted by risk. As Winseck points out “the proliferation of risk and uncertainty will accompany changes in technological and information abundance” (2002:116). With the introduction of digital technology, the controlled nature of television is being interrupted, and a process of complete reconfiguration of the medium is underway. The precision of broadcasting mutates instead into a highly complex field of activity where randomness and the unknown characterise affairs.

Particular uncertainties pervade the whole field and mean that change, with its concomitant process of risk, affect television on a number of levels. For instance, confusion surrounds the regulatory approach, the number and nationality of firms within the industry, consumer demand, the extent of technological change, and so on. The overall question is whether these factors will result in a radically new type of communications medium in the long-term. This is the starting-point for an article by Chalaby and Segell (1999:351-368), in which the authors seek to contextualise the shifts wrought by digital technology by invoking the risk society thesis as a conceptual framework.

The first theme the authors identify is that digitalisation increases both the level and intensity of uncertainty within broadcasting in relation to market demand, forcing those who work in the industry to alter their activities (Chalaby and Segell, 1999:354). The need is for broadcasters to be a part of the future which digital represents, and their long-term position depends upon decisions made in the present.

The problem though is that there is far more competition in the industry now that broadcasting has been opened up, allowing new players, including international companies, to enter British broadcasting.

The choices firms make will allow them to shape the future and prosper by gaining a first-mover advantage through creating markets for services and programming that consumers will want. As Bazalgette (2002:63) explains, risk is what companies must engage in order to survive to avoid being competed out of existence. Devising business strategies is hugely problematic given that the demand for multi-channel television is as yet unknown, and decisions have to be made with little prior knowledge of market trends (Chalaby and Segell, 1999:354). Humphreys and Lang (1998:11) detail a number of uncertainties that will dictate decisions to be made in broadcasting in the near future. These range from the attempt to uncover what consumers are willing to pay for, calculating how much channel proliferation the market will bear, the regulatory barriers that may obscure competition and whether it is possible to have a single European market in broadcasting.

Despite this general unpredictability, losing out on the opportunities the market offers is a more serious issue and it is this which pressurises the need for swift decisions. Foster (2002:127) explains that innovation and risk taking in this highly uncertain market will only take place if there is the prospect of the investor making an adequate return. Such decisions however are complicated by the segmented audience profiling that digital broadcasting has to undertake. The location of mass markets is particularly difficult when broadcasters have to target niche sections. These matters are further compounded given that the extent and effects of convergence are extremely difficult to predict. A measure formulated to counter market risks is to enlarge the overall business. Doyle (2002:64) explains how broadcasters are spreading risks and increasing their chances of success by involving themselves in many different activities. Establishing control over a range of products will improve market share in the long term because it allows the successful activities to subsidise loss-making projects until a profit can be garnered. A particular strategy of trial and error in this period of transition is required:

Where industries are undergoing significant change, companies engaged in one activity may expand into other activities to, in effect, hedge their bets. It is unclear in broadcast markets whether profits will be taken out of the industry at the point of delivery, content creation or publishing or even spread between any of them. For this reason some companies may attempt to be involved in many activities until the future seems more certain (Duffy, Davies and Daum, 1998:44).

Incumbents benefit from a particularly strong position that enables them to gain a foothold on the future. The huge capital outlay required to launch and sustain broadcast services dictates that only those firms that can withstand years of loss-making before earning a return on their investment can enter the field (Humphreys and Lang, 1998:16).

While competition intensifies and insecurity predominates, becoming a bigger corporate entity enables businesses to enlarge and therefore spread their risks. To undertake this, firms are being forced to change their composition and join forces with other players. The configuration of the field is in a constant state of flux as partnerships, mergers, alliances, splits and take-overs characterise corporate behaviour (Chalaby and Segell, 1999:356). It is these costs and risks in establishing a digital operation that limits the number of potential competitors (Humphreys and Lang, 1998:31). The notion of risk sums up the economic imperative to survive and is an essential pre-requisite for survival in the first instance and eventual success.

The regulation of broadcasting is another area where risks prevail (Chalaby and Segell, 1999:357). The authors point out how regulations may not cohere with the changing market structure of the industry and could therefore be out of step with corporate developments. Foster (2002:124) argues regulation must understand the market dynamic in order to create a structure within which competition can thrive. Competition ensures firms perform efficiently and will develop the technology in line with consumer preferences. Regulatory issues are complicated further however, by the transnational character of the emerging television landscape, where the possibility exists for inconsistencies in the approach between different countries.

Moreover, the presence of multiple regulatory authorities within single countries brings yet more chaos towards the development of the medium. Subjecting

broadcasters to several levels of inquiry could drag on their activities, thereby stifling creativity. Gibbons (1998b:91) highlights the significance of this by explaining that “where overlaps do exist, there is often an unnecessary duplication of regulatory oversight”. Regulatory confusion must be eradicated because it destabilises the industry and may hold back innovation. Additionally, the uncertainty in regards to switchover has to be eased with a definite date, particularly as this curtails investment in digital services (Chalaby and Segell, 1999:358). They equate this incoherence in regulatory issues with Beck’s (1998:14) point that risk society conveys the impression that no one is in overall charge, a factor that portends further disorientation on an already muddled state of affairs (Chalaby and Segell, 1999:358). So, regulatory confusion, market uncertainty and the pace of technological change have submerged television into an overall atmosphere of bewilderment.

Risk theory advances that the State has comparatively less involvement in the running of late modern society as opposed to the influence it exerted during industrial society (Beck, 1998:12). Power has gradually passed to experts in the fields where risks have intruded, so that doctors, engineers, industry and other technologists are entrusted to make political decisions. The State has also become superseded by transnational authorities that deal with the increased scope of the threats to the whole planet (Lupton, 1999:66). As these risks are transnational in nature, countries become locked into a ‘world risk society’ whereby the magnitude of the dangers triggers new impulses towards the development of co-operative international institutions to tackle threats jointly (Beck, 1995:2).

For Chalaby and Segell (1999:360), this focus on a worldwide perspective translates as the declining influence and power of public service institutions in the multi-channel future. They feel that the likelihood of public service retaining any significant market share and status is reduced by the tendency to operate the industry according to commercial rationale. Moreover, there has been an ideological shift in broadcasting across Europe in favour of market forces (Dahlgren, 2000b:29). The drive to fragment audiences does not sit comfortably with the common knowledge role of public service broadcasting and illuminates an irreconcilable tension between the two. Steemers (1998b:102) explains how the drive to segment audiences threatens

all generalist channels as it removes their audience share and impinges significantly on their role as public servants.

Furthermore, it has already become apparent how digitalisation accelerates the internationalisation of broadcasting, with far more transnational companies entering national settings to capture the biggest audience share. This echoes Beck's (1995:2) ideas about a 'world risk society', formulated to deal with the international scale of contemporary issues. The borderless character of risks results in global alliances and transnational strategies to capture the largest audience share and also spread the risks inherent within unknown markets. This undermines the position of public service broadcasters as it forces them to compete and subjects them to market rules (Chalaby and Segell, 1999:362). Doubts on the need of public service and pressures on its continuation further reinforce the claim of the commercialisation of broadcasting.

This also resonates with Beck's (1998:15) arguments concerning industry as the province of decision-making, owing to Government's relaxation of its own powers. Technological mastery resides with commercial broadcasters and their increasing sophistication of equipment will lead to a gradual squeezing out of the BBC (Chalaby and Segell, 1999:360). Thus, competition, international in scope, heralds difficulties for national, public broadcasters. These problems are exacerbated by the inability of public broadcasters to make long-term investment to meet the rising costs for new projects given that their income sources are not as deep as their commercial counterparts (Steemers, 1998b:102-104). The profit imperative means that the sector is increasingly being run like any other business so there is no room for a doctrine that does not put this at the centre of its remit. Public service broadcasters are thus disorientated from their duties by the forces of technological innovation that are modernising television.

Beck (1994:7) also argues how risk society generates a process of individualisation amongst its members. This he explains as the shift away from stable forms of existence that people experienced in industrial society, where structured paths of development guided people in the conduct of their lives. Such consistencies have been replaced by the turbulence of the risk society, where individuals are confronted with an elaborate array of choices in each area of activity. Lupton

(1999:115) explains that this greater range of uncertainties impinging on the conduct of individual lives is the outcome of wider social changes, including transformations in the economic order, youth unemployment and insecurities in the job market. It is modernisation then that frees individuals from the collective conscience, so that people must now face a multitude of choices in a world of increasing complexity (Adams, 1995:182). Decisions regarding careers, schools, pension schemes, and so on are now more important since their ramifications may be felt for years to come (Lupton, 1999:72). Individuals float free from security and tradition, and face more choices in place of established paths of progress, without their supporting norms and expectations (Scott, 2000:37). Family, locality, class and other primary spheres of influence have dissolved through modernisation and without these, individuals have greater responsibility to themselves.

Chalaby and Segell (1999:365) claim that the digitalisation of broadcasting is both reflective of, and an extension to the process of individualisation, as it introduces far more programming choice, along with a greater range of services than analogue television. Video-on-demand facilities, pay-per-view channels, click-on icons and home shopping together constitute a huge plethora of options that individuals have to make by themselves (ibid.). Hughes and Marshall (2002:25) claim that this endows greater control to viewers, who are increasingly able to arrange their own personal viewing experience. The fact is that digital technology allows television to become an individual's medium, tailoring output to the needs of each audience member who then has to construct their viewing accordingly, removed from the intentions of schedulers. The range of communicative possibilities is enlarging in such a fashion that viewers can engage in activities not commonly associated with broadcasting. Watching television will become a more active process, with personal input from each viewer for his or her own ends.

However, the structured nature of broadcasting is being replaced by a more fragmented and singular narrowcast experience. The effect of this is that television will be restricted to fewer occasions of mass audience tuning into the same broadcast (Chalaby and Segell, 1999:366). Corner (1999:120) claims that this reduces the 'cultural density' of television in that there will be less shared viewing experiences. The ability of television to help ferment national forms of consciousness is

considerably diminished in this scenario as people will not be watching the same programmes and could even be using it for radically different purposes. The common bond broadcasting has embellished disappears in the light of individualisation.

Overall then, the risk society thesis postulates the idea of a major break within modernity, rooted within the processes of modernisation itself (Beck, 2000:213). Beck's arguments highlight the way society orientates itself and its resources in response to the unpredictable forces it generates of its own accord. Lash (2002:211) argues that it is excess, brought about unintentionally, that is out of control in the risk society. These ideas, transposed onto the field of broadcasting, enable us to perceive a break in television's history and the future issues that are dictating its progress (Chalaby and Segell, 1999:366). This is because such a framework pinpoints the main theme of destabilisation, along with its related effects, and latches it onto the field of broadcasting where these tendencies are manifested. While digital technology offers the medium a new beginning and opportunities for broadcasters to colonise new markets and prosper, it does so against an increasingly unsettled background that permeates the whole field, throwing up dangers to all who are trying to capture the audience. Risk therefore instils an urge to act immediately, immersing affairs in urgency (Van Loon, 2002:190). In this way, risk describes the actions broadcasters are simultaneously guided and constrained by, illuminating the need to take decisive action, yet caution at the possibility of getting it wrong.

Risk theory then emphasises the darker side of futurism by highlighting how the unknown, and the fear of it, generates anxieties upon present activities in the attempt to anticipate it. For television, the concern of losing out on the future forms a considerable worry so that broadcasters, policy-makers and industry players have a compulsion towards snap, major decisions. The forces for change originate within television itself, by advancements in broadcast technology and policy measures to increase competition. These together constitute a process of modernisation, yet paradoxically, cloud the field in confusion and a totalising lack of clarity of what the future is. The general trend of insecurity in risk society is particularly apt in explaining the series of unknowns that typify the development of the medium now, mainly because the number of changes, their intensity and their presence at various

levels within television mean there is no certainty of where digital technology is driving the medium and the effect this will have.

The Refeudalised Public Sphere

Habermas's work on the public sphere does not conclude with its continued ability to serve and heighten democratic purposes. Rather, the historical analysis he adopts illuminates how the press has altered in structure and function to the detriment of its civic role, corresponding with a wider, more general dynamic of social change over the same period. He explains this mutation as one of 'refeudalisation':

Therewith emerged a new sort of influence i.e., media power, which, used for the purposes of manipulation, once and for all took care of the innocence of the principle of publicity. The public sphere, simultaneously prestructured and dominated by the mass media, developed into an arena infiltrated by power in which, by means of topic selection and topical contributions, a battle is fought not only over influence but over the control of communication flows that affect behaviour while their strategic intentions are kept hidden as much as possible (Habermas, 1992:437).

The conditions under which enterprises have had to operate have changed dramatically during the twentieth century, forcing a shift in media firms and the broader business sector. White (1988:115) stresses that the relationship between the individuals and the economy has also altered as industrial concerns have become the dominant social maxim and that this process induces further changes.

It is in the very same patterns of trade from which the public sphere emerged that its decline can be traced, returning the level of critical engagement back to a more medieval style of discourse, devoid of substance and only illusionary in terms of its rational content. This is labelled as 'refeudalisation' in that Habermas (1989:195) identifies a historical parallel between the public systems of exchange in contemporary liberal democracies and their comparative state some five hundred years previously. The neglect of citizenry in the everyday affairs of society characterises both, as does the prioritising of private endeavours over public objectives. The public sphere of modern societies weakens under the unavoidable

pressures of such forces and its ability to serve civic ends is considerably impaired (McNair, 1999:26).

The intensification of trade practises mean that capitalist tendencies have expanded to such an extent that they intrude further into the fabric of everyday life, converting culture into a market type relationship. Private interests are prioritised in order to secure profit, relegating public aims as a consequence (Held, 1980:262). This situation is described:

[Re]feudalisation of the public sphere makes it possible for all social relations to be integrated into the market of proprietary governance, effacing that crucial distinction and balance between society, the state and the market which has been historically essential to counter-absolutist struggles since the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century (Venturelli, 1998:231).

Capitalism directs all institutions towards the pursuit of profit so that fierce competition governs all social activities. Such patterns in the newspaper industry have led to increasing monopolisation in ownership with fewer titles and a corresponding shift in content (Curran, 1991:40).

Triviality and tabloidisation characterise the press alongside a lighter journalistic style of less critical inquiry. Journalism has therefore shifted its remit from a profession dedicated to the questioning of elites to joining those very same interests. Its critical faculties have diminished as commercial questions are now the organisational principles of the large-scale industrial entities in which newspapers have been subsumed. As Pusey (1987:107) stresses, the public sphere dissolves and is reconstituted as an imperative of the economic subsystem. The incorporation of the media into the mainstream ameliorates its radical edge and moves it away from civic duties. White (1988:112) clarifies how advanced capitalism has thus succeeded in defusing class conflict by neutralising the public sphere as a site of effective participation, a factor that constitutes a new phase of systemic integration between economy and polity.

The fundamental problem then is the increasing intrusion of the market. Theorists posit it as a threat because actors pursue their own interests, whereas in the

public sphere their actions are orientated to reach universal agreement on the common good (Garnham, 2000:171). The media are, despite their clear public characteristics, engaged in forms of exchange that are distinctly private owing to the market forces which govern their organisation. Outhwaite (1994:137) points out that under these conditions of self-interest the rational discussion of public affairs and decision-making are naturally affected. Any potential to execute public roles is circumvented by the structural operations of the economy to which the media have become an important part, directing them towards paths of systemic conformity. The media are thus locked into a circuit of perpetual competition, manifest in the depoliticised content formulated to chase the audience. Communication becomes just another domain of cultural consumption, fashioned by the industry, with the emphasis on increasing sales rather than serving civic ends (Thompson, 1990:112). Commercialisation has dramatically changed the character of information within the public realm and placed it in the service of large-scale industrial entities to such an extent that political and civic issues are excluded.

There are further aspects to refeudalisation that further impinge on the media's ability to fulfil the canons of the public sphere. The growth of advertising and public relations are serious encroachments on the public sphere according to Habermas (1989:189), because the sophisticated communicational techniques they employ distort rational-critical debate, hijacking the public sphere in the process. That is, they are laden with private concerns and are diametrically opposed to the canons of the public sphere as they seek to advance some sort of individual gain. Given that they are funnelled through the public forum of the media, a distorted conversation is created in which the terms of the debate and its content may well be antithetical to civic discourse. These industries represent the direct control by private or State interests of public information (Garnham, 1986:41).

The State has become a major participant in the economy and its private interests mean that the space between civil society and the State that the public sphere represented has been closed. McGuigan (1996:26) explains that the partnership forged between the State and capital organises the conditions of everyday life through administering the forms of conversation. Projecting publicity is a necessary means to heighten private causes as it brings them into a wider market and this is precisely

what advertising and PR seek to achieve. Outhwaite (1994:10) stresses that because of this “the public sphere becomes manipulated in which the state and corporations use ‘publicity’ to secure for themselves a kind of plebiscitary acclamation”. The very nature of publicity has dramatically changed by assisting in private matters, conflating them as public issues, to usher in a period of neomercantalism (Habermas, 1989:231).

The concern to cultivate personal aura, rather than the need to stimulate rational-critical debate resembles the type of representative publicness of the middle ages (Thompson, 1994:94). The point is that commercial imperatives have diluted the principle of critical publicity as it has expanded into more areas of modern life. Politics itself changes to a form of spectacle because of these factors and politicians are converted into showmen (Habermas, 1989:195). The public sphere is therefore not immune from the sprawling influence of capitalism and in fact becomes a major location for its extension since it effectively invokes the notion of publicity to effectively disseminate private needs. The transmission of publicity is a necessary means to heighten private causes as it brings these interests into a larger domain.

For Habermas (1992:436), the infrastructure of the public sphere has been realigned with new forms of organisation, marketing, large-scale production, the relevance of advertising, the fusion of entertainment and information, and greater centralisation. The dimensions of public space have thus been reconfigured to suit private needs, thereby impinging on the conversation therein. The dramatic change in character is down to capitalism where the emphasis on individualism holds that private interests militate against the public good. Pusey (1987:90) sums up how the whole process of modernisation brings with it a deepening irrationality via the manipulation of public opinion, the forced articulation of social needs through large organisations and the management of politics by the system.

The refeudalisation perspective identifies digitalisation as yet further erosion of television’s capacity to inform (Murdock, 2000b:47). The technology brings with it a series of consumerist tendencies that steer the medium away from its civic duties and corrode the public sphere as a consequence. The argument centres on how television now functions as a commercial entity, unable to operate outside of a business framework that enforces a logic onto it that shifts it towards economic

priorities. This reflects the expanding commodification of life and the increasing reach of capitalism into areas that were once protected from it (White, 1988:115). The consequent reorientation to economic, rather than cultural duties, stresses different priorities in terms of how television should operate, how it is to be funded, how it regards its audience, the programming strategies of broadcasters and the underlying philosophy. Its application is described below:

Whether the publishing industry or, even more importantly, the television and newspaper business, a primary purpose today is the 'feudal' one of the celebration of capitalist styles of life, whether through adulatory displays of the 'stars', partisan and partial news coverage, or subordination of content to the dictates of advertisers calling for the maximum size of audiences (Webster, 2002:166).

The point is that digitalisation is part of a larger project of converting television into a commercial resource by prioritising industrial considerations. Its technological significance is superseded by the general direction of broadcasting policy that institutes a more commercial environment that it has to operate within. Digital television is being organised in such a way because the regulatory regime considers it an integral part of a vision to make the medium resemble any other consumer good.

To comprehend change then, less attention should be paid to the technology itself and more to the political measures that have formulated its direction. In his discussion of change during the 1980's, Goodwin (1998:173) stresses that it was Government policy, rather than economic or technological inevitability that structured the new distribution technologies of cable and satellite onto paths of deregulation. There was nothing intrinsic that dictated this, but instead a concerted effort as part of a broader political project which in total represented an ideological shift for the medium. Similarly, Ledbetter's (1997:2) work on the elimination of public broadcasting in the USA during the 1980's emphasises how powerful interests groups in central Government and corporate circles attacked its very foundations, crippling it financially to consequently isolate its overall significance in the broadcasting terrain. Television has to be comprehended in such terms as changes to it are instituted politically, constitutive of a larger ideological movement (Goodwin, 1998:8). Observing such measures confirms for this viewpoint how digital is one further

advance towards refeudalising television's democratic capabilities and distancing it away from public needs.

The chief means test for this is in the inexorable slide away from public service broadcasting. The dangers of a fully commercialised broadcasting system have been documented in previous sections, as has the need to preserve public service. This perspective stresses that sufficient momentum away from the latter in recent years has built up such that it is unlikely to recover. The systemic imperatives that have converted communication into an industrial sector dictate that there will be an inevitable transition in the whole ecology of broadcasting. This direction is evident within the policy environment and the corporate mind-set that prevails within broadcasting institutions. Negrine (1994:197) claims that the future of broadcasting will be very different because most firms involved in it are commercial so that their public responsibilities are dwarfed by the economic logic of their organisations. These attributes are to be reflected in the content and organisational arrangements of the medium where competition through mainstream content will drive all broadcasters towards the largest audience share. Cultural aims are naturally relegated as cost becomes an objective in itself, forcing broadcasters to become preoccupied with notions of efficiency rather than programming (Van Gompel et al, 2002:184).

Moreover, this impacts on public service broadcasters as they too must function within this market so that digitalisation is a significant moment in directing television away from its public role and closer to the very same private interests that have corroded other spheres of activity. Hoynes (1994:155) explains that public television exists within an environment defined by market forces and must accordingly compete for financial resources and viewers, making certain outcomes more likely than others. Similarly, Tracey (1998:17) argues that if public service moves into a commercial direction there follows the deconstruction of its purpose with a consequent avalanche of unfortunate outcomes such as the decline in programme standards and ultimately in the general impoverishment of the nation's culture and spirit.

These commentators agree that it is not possible to have peaceful co-existence between the two systems because the presence and force of commercial broadcasting

impresses a dilution of public service when the latter is forced to compete and adhere to a market rationale. Hoynes (1994:135) outlines that market operations permit little room for the development of a new relationship to citizens, so public television is engaged within the same activities and mind-set as its commercial counterpart. This is the real problem in the multi-channel age: where public service cannot be set apart from the market it will have to engage in some form of competition even though this runs contrary to its philosophy and detracts from realising its commitments. The market's criteria of success have thus been invoked for the performance of all cultural institutions, such that it impacts on how they are funded, organised and evaluated (Murdock, 2000b:39).

The current drive to deregulate television is unavoidable because, as Hoynes (1994:5) explains, its privatisation has to be understood as part of an ongoing movement of how societies are to be organised and the social relations of production and consumption. Similarly, Dahlgren's (2000b:32) work demonstrates how deregulation is not isolated from other societal developments and forms part of a larger shift in the political climate of Western societies. This encompasses a strong, international, Libertarian shift to the right as restrictions on market forces are removed. Tracey (1998:279) takes a comparable stance by demonstrating how the very notion of public service is one that is at odds with the prevailing reasoning in both broadcasting and society. He proceeds to argue that it espouses a language of 'us' when the common discourse is one of 'me' (ibid. 285).

The imperatives of consumerism have become a yardstick for all social activities and television too has fallen under its reach. It is impossible to reconcile the logic of capitalism with public service broadcasting as it cannot guarantee profit, thereby forcing it to shift focus. The understanding then is that there is a concerted drive towards a fully commercialised system as this is more in line with how society distributes its resources and in such circumstances there can be at best only token, yet ineffective provision of public service.

Another strand of analysis concerns the evaluation of the corporate mind-set that has enveloped the sphere of broadcasting and which seems to hold the future development of the field in its hands. Schroder and Skovmand (1992:9) highlight two

consequences that this engenders: common denominator programming aimed at mainstream tastes and segmented production, targeting programmes towards well-defined audience groups with specialised needs. The commercial logic forced onto broadcasters and producers mean that only a quantitative definition of quality can be invoked to complement the influence of cost they are constrained by. That is, such circumstances demand that the stress is on higher audience ratings. Negrine (1994:197) stresses that without public service obligations commercial broadcasting organisations will have to favour the most popular, cheapest and most profitable fare regardless of its cultural merit. This stifles creative output by imposing a rigid framework to chase the middle ground in the form of devising safe formats that can deliver audiences. Innovation and experimentation cannot comfortably exist in this situation (Khan, 2001:103). There will be a lack of diversity in programming and a duplication of provision in profitable areas as viewers are more likely to seek out the familiar rather than the new, encouraging uniformity in output (Thompson, 2002:59).

There are yet more worrying trends when broadcasting is fitted into an economic matrix that looks towards cost and audience numbers over any other criteria. The financing of programming has to be spread thinly over the greater number of channels and other projects broadcasters are now involved in as they try to cement their future in the digital age. The dangers of this are detailed below:

...trash, trivia and sensation can be bought to the marketplace at a surprisingly low cost. Truth, responsibility and quality have always taken longer, and for the most part carry a far higher price tag – and thereby, necessarily a far higher social value (Puttnam, 2001:111).

This is an unavoidable consequence of approaching the audience as consumers, rather than as citizens, and of prioritising market demand over civic obligation. The types of programming that would occupy the airwaves then are docusoaps, gameshows and other cheap fare whose contribution to rational-critical debate is negligible (Webster, 2002:174). This position is of the opinion that the popular and the educational in programming are separate entities and that the latter depends upon the depth in financial resources that a commercial, multi-channel system will not dispense with.

Quality is further threatened as an unregulated market produces an abundance of specialised, low cost programmes for particular audiences, such as pornography (Lipsey, 2001:57). Tracey (1998:264) is in no doubt that the new communications realm propels 'dumbing down' as its industrial logic enforces linguistic poverty through the type of programming that trivialises public discourse and marginalises the important. This isolation can be detected in the scheduling of any output that is not mainstream. Webster (2002:173) explains that quality programming becomes confined to small ghettos and only available via subscription while the mainstream is filled with 'infotainment'. Khan (2001:101) meanwhile, finds that minority programmes are moved into graveyard slots. Finally, local programming comes under threat as broadcasters think globally and focus their attention on the widest market to the detriment of regional audiences (Aaronovitch, 2002:87).

A commercial broadcasting system is also heavily reliant on advertising and this potentially brings yet more problems. Hoynes (1994:33) argues television's aim changes from serving audiences to delivering audiences to advertisers, with the onus on size and demographic quality. Since they are not the intended customers, it follows that material is not formulated for the benefits of audiences. Eyre (2001:91) explains that the primary obligation of commercial television is to the shareholders, followed by advertisers, relegating audiences to third, which of course public service enthrones as paramount. The danger is that this sets limits on the range of expression in programming which becomes a purveyor of private interests (Van Gompel et al, 2002:183). The growth and significance of sponsorship could also lead to the promotion of commercial criteria in programming (Webster, 2002:175).

Furthermore, the perils of advertising are that the actual form of programming changes. Skovmand (1992:99) demonstrates the rise of 'advertorialism' in recent years as a hybrid between editorial matter and advertising, and goes on to explain that it is a serious problem as programming content comes under undue pressure from commercial interests to include their products in the output. This is a serious worry because it threatens the integrity of the material and places broadcasters under the threat of commercial interference. All of these factors urge Schroder and Skovmand (1992:12) to argue that in its deregulated incarnation television has become the most

powerful vehicle for direct advertising and for more indirect forms of promoting consumer awareness.

Commentators point out how the American model of commercial broadcasting neatly illustrates the problems inherent in the system. Kellner (1990:173) shows how American broadcasting organisations were swept up into reinforcing the institutions that controlled them, namely State and corporate power, thus precipitating a crisis of democracy and journalism. He demonstrates this by highlighting how programming standards fell and the amount of advertising time increased as television was directed towards serving the interests of State and corporate power. Ledbetter (1997:157) buttresses this position by illustrating how news and current affairs have been systematically neglected in the USA owing to their inability to secure high audience figures. The degradation of investigative programming and commercialisation of news are recurring features of the system (Cramer, 2002:97). These are unashamedly serious problems for the articulation of civic discourse. Furthermore, there have been serious doubts over the integrity of information with occurrences of bias in the topics selected and their coverage (Kellner, 1990:180). Barnett (2000:157) claims the poor quality in US broadcasting and the tendency to instil inexpensive fillers throughout the schedule confirms it as the living embodiment of market failure. The implications of deserting public service are visibly illustrated with an observable model of the flaws embedded within a commercial approach.

It is no surprise then that the ideological nature of broadcasting changes in a radical manner given the difference in priorities between the two systems. With its duties channelled towards such ends, refeudalisation of the space of television is unavoidable while it is locked into a different set of priorities. The net result of these overlapping patterns is captured below:

A conclusion can then be drawn about *the new television*. Its very nature constitutes a fundamental taking apart of that sense of the collective, the public, the shared which is a precondition for the continuity of public service broadcasting (Tracey, 1998:54, italics in original).

The emphasis here is not only on the technological tendency to instil a more singular viewing experience, but rather the whole movement towards individualism that is at

odds with the collective spirit that defines public service. Without this, the medium exists only for profit purposes and is, ironically, prone to market inefficiencies. This perspective regards the formation of monopolies as highly probable given the finances at stake, so that the outcomes of commodification are manifest in both the structure and form of the media as industrial concentration and standardised content are its defining features. Research has started to emerge on how broadcasting markets are subject to mercantilist tendencies that exhibit concentration in ownership, an eventuality that furthers the likelihood of trivial and uncritical output (Webster, 2002:175). Television has thus become a site for the extension of capitalism, initiated in the political quarters that have shaped its structure and implemented by the corporate institutions who are developing it.

Garnham (1992:362) explains that there is an intensifying focus on the television set as an increasingly privatised, domestic mode of production. This accounts for the manner in which the audience has been labelled and approached according to the axiom of consumerism when television has become a site of market power. Individuals are addressed as singular units with the attention on their consumption. The interactive capabilities that digitalisation adds to television are to be utilised for consumer purposes such as shopping and banking rather than civic objectives. It is the audience's purchasing power that becomes the target for broadcasters, rather than any commitment to the public good. Dahlgren (1995:148) argues that 'public sphering' is not television's dominant purpose given the conditions under which it has to function as it has become the vehicle for consumer culture, where the solutions it offers are individualistic.

Television has become a consumerist instrument, simultaneously emitting the benefits of capitalism and providing services that further those ends in an overall structure that has been formulated by those processes. This focus on transactions and economic exchange explains why television is able to further the doctrine and practise of capitalism, resonating with Habermas's (1989:162) point that the mass media have transmogrified into a sphere of cultural consumption where the web of public communication unravels into acts of individuated reception.

The ideas of Habermas illustrate how the public sphere changes in structure, operation and character and that these shifts are to be explained wholly by the intrusion of private interests into previously public domains. McGuigan (1996:28) points out how Habermas situates culture within the economic and technical discourse of public policy to highlight its linkage to industrial and economic interests. By doing so, it is possible to identify a new anchorage in television's priorities illuminated by a relentless march away from public service broadcasting. The dimensions of public space are undergoing reconstruction to suit private needs, thereby encroaching on the critical distance, rationality and conversation within what should be the public forum par excellence. With the public means of delivery colonised and no clear demarcation between the separate spheres of State, market and citizenry, all are caught up by the economic dynamic of capitalism.

Digital television can not arrest the decline of the public sphere because it is driven and governed by the same forces that have already refeudalised civic space. Its absorption by the logic of the market dictates that the medium is not able to realise its democratic potential and will instead serve private needs, advertising purposes and be utilised to advance personal aura. The conditions of capitalism impel profit and hence structural change in the medium in exactly the same manner that other areas have been engulfed by its pervasive reach. In his account of the decline of public broadcasting in the USA, Kellner (1990:181) sums up the essence of this position by stressing how capitalism defeats democracy to the extent that the public sphere declines owing to its control by the capitalist class. It would be fair to conclude on these grounds that while the twentieth century represents a major departure for civic discourse, the mercantilist tendencies endemic within trading worryingly portend that the twenty-first century could threaten another structural transformation in media systems that may eradicate it further.

Political Economy

The political economy tradition in the social sciences has established a reputation for itself as a critical method of inquiry concerned with issues of power and control in society. It relates these to the economic system, which it regards as

determinant towards social formations and the functioning of particular aspects of society (Golding and Murdock, 2000:71). By observing the operations and structural features of the economic base, political economists feel they are able to explain various features and patterns endemic to capitalism and how these have evolved. Its approach is described below:

One can think about political economy as the study of *the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources*. Moreover, political economy tends to concentrate on a specific set of social relations organised around power or the ability to control other people, processes and things, even in the face of resistance (Mosco, 1996:25; italics in original).

It is this focus that leads researchers towards examining the structural operations of the market and industrial practises, both of which impinge upon macrosocietal formations. Boyd-Barrett (1995:186) points out that the way a society's resources are produced, distributed and consumed has a distinct bearing on social patterns and the ability to participate fully.

Accounting for who gets what and why this is so is the corner-stone of this theoretical approach as it seeks to explain inequalities in society and why these are reproduced over time, pinpointing the capitalist mode of production as one that has particular results. It is within the system of organisation and its by-products that inequality is created because these processes work against certain groups in favour of others (Murdock, 2000a:8). Unequal class relations and massive disparities in wealth are unavoidable consequences of the process of accumulation that define the capitalist mode of production according to this position.

Political economy stresses the need to adopt an historical perspective when trying to ascertain evolving social trends and their implications (Webster, 2002:126). The benefit of this is it means continuities and breaks with the past are clearly detectable making wider explanations for new developments more plausible at the same time as identifying likely future trajectories. This approach considers the totality of social relations in that it adopts a broad canvas to observe the interplay between different factors and their effects (Boyd-Barrett, 1995:186). By doing so, it highlights flows of power, how these are exercised and the ends to which they are working.

These angles of inquiry frequently reveal that capitalist society is inherently unequal and yet manages to persist through control of the means of production and the ideological support systems that direct themselves to its continuation (Herman and Chomsky, 1988:2). Apart from unravelling its logic, political economy adopts a critical stance in that it seeks to highlight the possibilities for improvement as well as identifying the deep-seated weaknesses in the system. Commentators claim that the tradition is motivated by a sense of praxis as it feels morally obligated to act on the world as well as to explain it (Boyd-Barrett, 2002:49; Mosco, 1996:134). The solutions it offers tend to emphasise the need for public authorities and intervention in instances of market failure to enshrine the rights of citizenry.

The communication sector has been analysed through this method because political economists regard it as a key social resource, with a centrality to cultural life. Rooted in the social sciences, the position advances certain conceptual tools to explain how the media has developed in recent years and the underlying reasons for this. As two of the leading researchers in the field claim, political economy enables the analysis of communications to take place at the heart of social and cultural research (Golding and Murdock, 2000:72). By locating the media within its industrial context, this perspective feels it can explain media content, the distribution of information resources, the operations of the media and other such dynamics which explain the overall shape of the communication system. Furthermore, by invoking a Marxist scope of analysis, political economy not only describes the ways in which the cultural superstructure is determined by the economic base (Boyd-Barrett, 2002:50), it also contends that the former is an integral component towards the maintenance of existing class and power relations (Mosco, 1996:19).

The focus then is on the relationship between the economic structure and the dynamics of the industry alongside its ideological content (McQuail, 2000:83). In other words, the media is a core ideological agency that disseminates a pro-capitalist agenda to uphold the status quo, owing to its economic foundations which depend on such circumstances. The tradition then is about identifying the factors which link media industries with political, social and economic elites and how these influence

professional practises (Boyd-Barrett, 1995:191). A succinct definition of its application to the sphere of communication is provided below:

[I]t addresses the nature of the relationship of media and communication systems to the broader structure of society. In other words, it examines how media (and communication) systems and content reinforce, challenge or influence existing class and social relations. Second, the political economy of communication looks specifically at how ownership, support mechanisms (e.g. advertising) and Government policies influence media behaviour and content. This line of inquiry emphasises structural factors and the labour process in the production, distribution and consumption of communication (McChesney, 1998:3).

Media content then is a function of industrial configuration and has a crucial role in the wider social fabric. By observing the hidden aspects of information, such as ownership, the need to secure profit, linkages to political elite's and so on, we are endowed with a far greater understanding of the form media output takes, how accessible it is and the financial imperatives behind it.

It is in the exchange between the symbolic and economic dimensions of public communications that the material realities of cultural texts can be detected (Golding and Murdock, 2000:85). Observing this makes it possible to discern who benefits from the information the media industries convey, and it is this issue of how well citizens are served by the communication system that constitutes the other area of the tradition's concerns. McQuail (2000:82) advances that the overall strength of the position lies in its capacity for making empirically testable propositions with which to quantify the corporate control of information and the associations between income and information poverty.

Political economists have consistently found that a market approach has no concern towards issues of social inequality, neglecting them to the point of their accentuation given that distribution is not a matter addressed in its operations. Research findings have clarified this along two different routes, both of which forcefully demonstrate an unavoidable tendency to isolate the needs of citizenry. Firstly, in regards to access to information resources and communications technologies, markets exhibit a skew towards those already well off. Empirical findings repeatedly confirm a worrying gap between the information have and

information have-nots (Golding and Murdock, 2000:88). This is a logical consequence of capitalism which distributes on the basis of wealth and makes no allowance whatsoever for disadvantaged groups.

Secondly, media content has a propensity to endorse the political regime that underpins it, narrowing the diversity of viewpoints and delivering material that is favourable to business and political elites (Bagdikian, 1992; Schiller, 1996; Croteau and Hoynes, 1997; Ledbetter, 1997; Sussman, 1997). Both of these trends are consequences of a particular industrial structure of conglomeration and cross-ownership that continually nourishes them, indicative of capitalism's nature to perpetuate class and financial interests. The system of production has a requirement for companies to get bigger and in doing so they are seen to work against the public interest, with greater market dominance leading to control over the symbolic realm. It is the economic dimension, reinforced by political actions, that accounts for the manner in which cultural forms are created and delivered.

The new media revolution has provided political economy with a renewed impetus in its analysis of the logic of capitalism. A number of researchers have adopted this critical stance towards the new media and extended their inquiries to encompass the formation, industrial structure, diffusion and consumption patterns of these technologies in society (Herman and McChesney, 1997; Lax, 2001; Schiller, 2000; Webster, 2002). The general theme is that the new media have been designed and structured around the needs of capitalist accumulation and are made available on a market basis towards deeply unequal social formations. In doing so, their ability to change society is minuscule, as they have been generated by the same forces of organisation and are thus directed towards upholding those ends through generating profit for large interests. Golding (1998a:81) comments that "the new technologies are fast being commandeered by the forces of global inequality which have carved out the communications architecture of the past century". By checking corporate manoeuvrings it is possible to pinpoint who has developed the technology and the aims they have for it.

Studying ownership patterns reveals why the media cannot fulfil its complete potential and confirms how new occurrences in the information realm are shaped by

business imperatives to maintain dominant interests. Indeed, developments are driven by the needs of the production system itself, such as advertising, with consequences for cultural forms (Garnham, 2000:44). Evaluating these dynamics tells us what content is and is not sustainable. Additionally, observing social formations and income patterns will have far greater explanatory power towards understanding who will benefit from the diffusion of new technologies, especially as there is a direct correlation between wealth and the take-up of innovations (Schiller, 1996:143). These theorists stress that it is important to look at society and relationships within it before comprehending the position of a new technology. Their research reveals that the whole information society project is driven by the urgency to create a hi-tech capitalist economy, dedicated to the speedier circulation of goods and services over as vast an area as possible to entrench the financial needs of big enterprises. This is what Schiller (2000:203) labels 'digital capitalism' owing to the intensification and furtherance of the system of organisation via the technological realm.

In stressing economic imperatives, political economy sees globalisation as the central element and drive of a particularly intense period of high capitalism. McChesney (1998:2) argues that this process is in fact a set of economic policies with regard to profit maximisation and the free flow of goods and capital across borders with minimum regulation. There is an economic motor behind globalisation that is steering the process and any other changes that result from it must be understood in reference to the financial dynamics which have initiated it. The need for accumulation is driving private companies towards a transnational marketplace with the largest possible customer base (Schiller, 1996:92). A new strategy of internationalising custom has led to the formation of partnerships across States, with transnational companies becoming major economic protagonists in the global economy. Consequently, the overall composition of the sector is in a constant state of flux as firms seek to benefit from the advantages that economies of scale and scope will grant to bigger entities.

Several writers have documented this process, detailing how companies have engaged in cross-ownership, horizontal and vertical integration and enlargement to increase their holdings so that they can corner international markets (Murdock, 1990; Bagdikian, 1992; Hamelink, 1994; Mowlana, 1997; Herman and McChesney, 1997;

Golding, 1998a; Mattelart and Mattelart, 1998; Golding and Murdock, 2000). The sum of these activities is outlined:

New mergers, acquisitions and sell-offs continually change the specific make-up of conglomerates such as these multimedia operations, but also continue to enlarge the centralised control or influence over messages, images, lifestyles, cultural standards, social values and political norms (Sussman, 1997:132).

The shifting patterns of ownership under the guise of modernisation masks the real sense of change which is to control information in order to serve private interests. Technology only alters social patterns in as much as the institutions and processes that allow it and their concern is to shape the media into directions which necessarily will not permit that to happen.

Content then is simply a product, designed around the need to sell, an eventuality which becomes much easier when the means of supply are controlled. Despite (or maybe because of) the mechanism of the free market to facilitate the exchange of information goods and services, political economy demonstrates how oligopolies take root in sectors with large players who have the financial muscle to outlast smaller firms (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997:305). McChesney (1998:23) outlines the motives here as companies want to end up as one of the few monoliths controlling both the production and distribution networks, eliminating competition to gain the biggest market share possible.

With convergence, these trends have intensified as conglomerates who own content are fusing their activities across the common technological terrain to expand their reach. Hamelink (1994:260) details how digitalisation of the underlying media infrastructure facilitates consolidation within industries because it means sectors are no longer separate. This affords large companies the opportunity to grow further by spreading into other industries by controlling output. With supply managed, the market does not function freely so that the flow of goods and services is curtailed and firms are able to secure profit with greater ease. Market failure is an unavoidable consequence of high capitalism as the information industries can be controlled by existing players to their advantage. Without competition, output easily serves the large companies involved in its formulation. All of these economic strategies place a

disproportionate amount of control in the hands of big business, from which the implications for culture are worryingly negative. Research consistently reveals that large interests limit diversity, skewing the range and critical depth of content in instances of industrial concentration (Herman and McChesney, 1997:154).

Further consequences of capitalism are the widening chasms between the information rich and information poor, within and between countries. In regards to the international digital divide, political economy shows that developing nations are unable to recover from the first mover advantage the first world has established for itself (Mowlana, 1997:108). Media output and technology markets have been dominated and the sheer size of existing firms constitutes an unassailable barrier to entry for emerging players. All the major companies are Western, facilitating a predominantly one way communication flow from the west to the rest, resulting in a supremacy from which it is easier to shape the symbolic environment (Mattelart and Mattelart, 1998:92).

Apart from constraining indigenous talent and depriving the developed world from establishing its own media system, the political economy approach sees the import of western values and lifestyles transposed onto other cultures as an insidious tactic of furnishing other areas with capitalism's core value system. Furthermore, this adds up to a process of 'Cultural Imperialism' whereby the first world has controlled media markets the world over, using foreign locations as viable sites of expansion, stifling local endeavours in the meantime and establishing a dependency on Western products (Herman and McChesney, 1997:152). Whether one fully accepts the 'Cultural Imperialism' argument or not, the alarming spread of market power by transnational corporations is nevertheless a considerable cause for concern, particularly as it has been sanctioned by political authorities.

This same trend manifests itself within countries too, with those already socially advanced able to further their mastery of information resources by becoming early adopters of new innovations. The availability of resources is shaped within an existing political economy that authorises what becomes available and to whom. Golding (1990:96) claims that because information goods and services are made available on a differential basis, the social divisions that permeate society will

continue to grow. Rather than eradicate inequalities, new technologies may exacerbate cleavages between different groups owing to the inherent disparities that characterise a society divided by class, race and gender, which subsequently impact upon the application of innovations.

Golding and Murdock's (2000:87) research reveals that access to communications is sharply differentiated by income and that this gap is widening with the introduction of recent innovations. They show that there are clear divisions between social groups and that the pricing of television channels and/or programmes will be significantly governed by the distribution of household incomes. The growth of multi-channel television and pay per view services imposes increasing demands on limited disposable incomes and will increasingly differentiate the diet of material realistically available to various groups across the income gradient (ibid.). Sussman (1997:282) captures the full essence of this position by stating that "the global village of the future has little meaning for poorly paid classes".

By logical extension then, political economy regards the application of digital technology towards television as another stage development in the medium, but one that is corporate in character and effect, designed around gaining a competitive advantage and without the needs of the audience in mind. The companies and political authorities that structure the path of the medium regard this application as one that will benefit their ends and the needs of capitalist accumulation generally (Murdock, 2000b:47). The technology is imbued with a financial character that determines when it is deployed, who diffuses it and the conditions of availability.

Television is being developed by large institutions, international in reach, who have substantial interests in both media and non-media markets, and it is they who are locking the medium into questions of profit (Herman and McChesney, 1997:47). These companies have increasingly dominated the market in recent years, using their power to shape the directions of the whole communications terrain by forging alliances in political quarters in exchange for the permission to expand their size (Bagdikian, 1992:43). Since many of these firms are massive international conglomerates, their commitment to the public good is negligible as there is no single authority to whom they are responsible. Barker's (1997:230) research reinforces this

argument by demonstrating how television, particularly in this transnational phase, does have great potential for democracy which remains unrealised owing to consumerism and the interest groups who develop it.

The problems of a market approach have been documented by the previous approach and political economy echoes these concerns, emphasising the corporate objectives that lie at the heart of change and the threats to diversity they pose. Huge start up costs for channel operators confine supply to existing large players, rather than paving the way for new entrants. Moreover, structural constraints of audience maximisation are channelled into the content, with the outcome of light, escapist programming, converging on the middle ground of profitability (Webster, 2002:147). Indeed, Ewington (2002:37) documents how entertainment fills an increasing proportion of the schedule, even amongst terrestrial broadcasters. The invariable emphasis of the industry is on maximising ratings potential rather than learning potential (Barnett, 2000:156).

This position similarly laments the demise of public service as private companies shift the whole ideological nature of the medium to the right. Schiller (1996:21) contends that the distortions and inequalities of the market can only be rectified by public intervention, underlining the need for public service broadcasting. It is no accident that this has been attacked and financially weakened in recent years as the corporate sector has grown and cultivated a strong alliance with political authorities. Gardham (2001:121) argues that without public service broadcasting we live in walled gardens of selected information controlled by global converged conglomerates over which we will have no democratic say. That is, there are no safeguards for civic rights once the field of communication becomes the preserve of the private sector. The manner in which deregulation has become the de facto policy regime for the media sector confirms for political economy the institutionalised nature of change and the power of the interest groups which push through such measures.

Political economy emphasises the difference between knowledge and information in this respect and argues that the latter is of little value unless it contributes to the former (Lax, 2001:3). The task is to quantify the intrinsic value embedded with any item of information by inspecting the effort expended in its

manufacture, how inquisitive it is and the manner in which it enriches people's lives. According to this viewpoint, there is no need for a deluge of information unless it is qualitatively worthwhile as often more does not mean different, but instead translates as the same basic commodity appearing in different markets and in a variety of packages (Murdock, 1990:8).

Moreover, output from large businesses exhibits a tendency to be superficial and trivial because it serves corporate need by being so, while material that questions political authorities or economic interests is often sidelined (Schiller, 1996:44). The dichotomy is well illustrated by Graham (2000:105) who suggests that direct information is not knowledge but simply noise. It is in the need for audience maximisation that a shift in direction for the whole medium can be detected, narrowing down from a plethora of genres to the predominance of the few that are profitable. Bazalgette (2002:62) argues why this is so by stressing the preoccupation with distribution, rather than the programmes, which is leaving viewers short-changed. As broadcasters concentrate on opening up the routes to the viewers without focusing on the content, creativity is stifled and output recycled. Thus, audience needs are not furthered by the proliferation in the types of trivial information the current revolution is diffusing.

It begs the question of who this change is for and why it is being implemented at this moment in time if it has not been demanded. While previous changes in television, such as the transition from black and white to colour, were viewer led, digital is not (Hood and Tabery-Peterssen, 1997:87). The development has been initiated wholly on the supply-side by political authorities and private companies to create an information society for their own benefit. Garnham's (2000:44) research from consumption and expenditure patterns reveals a limited degree of change within the principle of relative consistency. Evidence confirms the proportion of disposable income spent on media consumption remains fairly constant over time. The huge outlays viewers would have to spend in order to maintain a fully operable free market are not viable or realistically plausible, especially when its benefits are negligible.

The movement towards subscription as an increasingly dominant source of finance is also a serious problem for political economists and encapsulates the crux of

the problem (Murdock, 2000b:53). Not only does direct payment threaten to make available only to those who can afford it, it does so with a diet that had previously been free at the point of use. This has been manifestly felt in the area of sports programming where major events have gone to the exclusive preserve of satellite, depriving fans of their enjoyment (Steemers, 1998b:102). Puttnam (2001:111) sums up the problem with this process by arguing how the right to information is the right to an essential service in the knowledge society and thus it is socially unacceptable to allow information haves and have nots to take root. Apart from depriving the economically disadvantaged, this also has the effect of creating a two-tier broadcasting system with the universally available programmes and services being far inferior (Shooshan and Cave, 2000:77).

This illustrates political economy's concerns neatly: old style content available at a new price alongside income levels as the chief determinant of the ability to participate in the new information society. Furthermore, the range of services provided depends upon the possible return they can generate for the private interests that underpin them (Levy, 1999:7). Digital television will not provide full Internet access, but instead a small number of sites that have a pay element to them. Moreover, Hughes (2000:40) clarifies that individuals will not exert total control because their navigation is curtailed by search engines, gateways and walled gardens that will direct them in pre-selected ways. Television is thus becoming a privately controlled environment, hijacked for the needs of big business. For these reasons, Sussman (1997:277) argues that television has become a private corporate instrument for organising communities of consumption from which profit can be agglomerated, where the onus is on selling to, rather than serving, the audience. The public nature of broadcasting has dissipated and its contours realigned, while the underlying fear is that television may not be able to function effectively in its new phase. Puttnam (2001:109) argues that these trends prove how the new world of technology is proving to be financially and culturally unsustainable.

The new technology has certain traits at which exploitation can occur, distorting the whole market and skewing it in favour of big companies whose activities will be difficult to curtail once they have established a foothold. Gate-

keeping control is the chief trouble spot that the business orientated approach to broadcasting will run into, as detailed below:

The danger of market failure persists with any dominant firm that is vertically integrated, especially as ownership becomes more concentrated. In the UK, the integration of BSkyB into programme content (including its interests in professional sports teams) has raised similar concerns. Regulation and competition officials have been especially wary of BSkyB's control over digital set-top boxes, conditional access systems and electronic programme guides. Issues of competitive access, the manipulation of technical standards and pricing related to high-frequency unbundling have arisen (Shooshan and Cave, 2000:78).

It is the emergence of certain nodes of importance within the technological infrastructure that power can be exercised and markets can be distorted to favour big players, over time squeezing out competitors.

Firstly, the existence of content rights and their importance to competing pay-television platforms could prevent competition emerging in the premium pay-tv market (Oliver, 2002:43). Since content is still actually limited, those broadcasters who have the programmes that most people want can exploit this by either making it available at exorbitant prices and/or selling it on to other broadcasters at an inflated cost. Secondly, Ewington (2002:37) explains that the EPG will define viewing patterns because it has created a new dominant segment in the television value chain. Where individual broadcasters are placed on the EPG could influence viewing (Foster, 2002:126). Thirdly, Collins and Murrioni (1996:39) explain how the firm with control over the conditional access system is likely to have gatekeeping powers over the entry of new services to the market, enabling it to set prices and conditions. These are serious problems and not issues that can be dealt with simply through competition policy. Overall then, the cost of entry, control over gateways, access to platforms, the problems of getting noticed amongst a rising tide of channels are all factors which temper the promise of the free market (Thompson, 2002:59). Together, this goes to show that power now lies with those who own the key building blocks to the new information and its abuse raises serious doubts for the continuation of civic purposes in broadcasting (Golding and Murdock, 2000:79).

Another dimension that concerns this viewpoint is how the actual properties of digital technology could dovetail neatly with the purposes of capitalist enterprise, enabling further abuses. Privacy could be encroached upon and the dangers of surveillance are heightened by a sophisticated application that has entered the home and can be used to track people's actions. A huge danger is:

the unwarranted and unsuspected surveillance to which users of digital television can be subjected. Digital television will bring a huge extension of centralised power into the home...because the profile that is built up of the hours people spend watching television, or the pattern of purchasers...can then be sold to and used by advertisers to target viewer interests (Williams, 2001:196).

The gathering of information via the set-top box to elicit what people have watched and purchased amounts to a serious encroachment of privacy and illuminates the manner in which private interests are furthered by digital television. Webster (2002:154) outlines the concerns here as the spread of surveillance for economic purposes to consolidate consumer capitalism as television is enhanced to become a means of selling goods and services.

The profiling of audiences according to demographics for the benefit of advertisers to allow individuals to be targeted easily according to past purchasers and consumption behaviour. Political economists are concerned at how far these secretive activities will go, intruding ever further into private lives (Murdock, 2000b:52). While advanced technology can be utilised for private ends, the fears of how the technology is actually to be utilised and by whom, remains. Sussman (1997:52) contends that the privacy and sanctity of information is threatened by the potential totalitarian reach of a power structure dedicated to knowing everything about everyone. If private concerns are allowed to become the overall objective of the medium then political economy advances that digital expands the corporate reach further into private settings so that businesses can capture audiences in more sophisticated ways.

Television has been restructured to cohere squarely within the parameters of capitalism and digital provides it with the ability to do that, becoming subject to competition law rather than a unique set of edicts consummate with its distinctiveness. Large interests are etched into the technology and these determine the

nature of this part of the communication system, including who the broadcasters are, the type of content the medium conveys and how this reaches the audience. First mover advantage enables early entrants to secure a central position and shape the way the market is organised (Murdock, 2000b:47). Other practises reinforce control of the incumbents to such a degree that the market is in fact a closed shop. Garnham (2000:54) calls this a model of 'post-Fordist flexible specialisation' in that it is characterised by the movement away from the assembly line mass markets of the twentieth century towards a global system of marketisation.

What this signifies is a distinct phase of capitalism seeking to utilise new practises and forms of organisation to embed itself into social life. For this reason, digital technology does not constitute a major epochal shift in capitalism's laws of motion, rather their extension (Meiksins Wood, 1998:28). This is what political economy does: clarify the systemic imperatives that are driving the communication system into a certain direction by looking at the changes in ownership patterns, the synergies with traditional media forms, the type of information made available and the arrangements for access to it. Applying this reveals the nature of change, illuminating how television's identity as a unique cultural instrument drops as it converges with other technologies, encouraging alliances amongst industrial players. Since the overall thrust that governs it is the same general theme of deregulation that has engulfed other areas of social life, it is a logical expectation to conceive of digitalisation as a definitive step in the medium's evolution towards privatisation.

Carey and Quirk (1973:486) contend that the discourses around the future and the promise of new technologies disguise a distinct political motive with exhortations to keep faith in new technologies in the belief that they will yield a way out of current dilemmas. Their work reveals a recurring historical pattern of vested interest groups investing unrealistic hope in the power of a range of different technologies to change the fundamental realities of existence. Such posturing deflects attention away from present turmoil and helps to maintain existing power relations by subduing unrest through generating eagerly awaited expectations. Morrison and Svennevig (2001:126) observe this too, outlining how the language in discussing technological change represents an economic and political hope. It is within this rhetoric that the belief for disadvantaged groups to better their circumstances are thought to lie.

Discourses about the future therefore serve as a form of false consciousness by focusing away from the problems of the present, and towards a time when these issues are no longer troublesome because of the power of technology (Carey and Quirk, 1973:490). Change does not happen in the way or to the extent that is proclaimed, largely because such positive accounts are infused with a technological determinism that is grossly flawed in explaining society (Williams, 2001:183). It pays no attention to the social patterns into which new technologies are transposed, or who they will be available to and thus offers only a partial explanation of the media-society relationship. The continued invocation of such an overtly positive position ensures that the future is a time frame that never arrives but is always awaited, attributing questions of social policy away from the authorities whose responsibility it is and placing them unrealistically on new innovations (Carey and Quirk, 1973:485).

While it is clear that the technological domain is on the cusp of a transformation this by no means changes the basic arrangements of society, illustrating how this theory believes social life takes direction from economic factors and political authorities. It is the economic dynamic that is determinant, not the technological, and it is in the interplay between such forces that the technologies development can be unravelled and its take-up understood. Far from dismantling the vertical hierarchies of power, digital television is being diffused on the same privatised basis to consolidate control in the sphere of production and to reinforce existing social relationships. Morrison and Svennevig (2001:127) confirm how it is not a revolution because it does not amount to a fundamental change in the way people live or in the patterns of social organisation. Rather, it is a commercially driven process and what is new is built upon the old to heighten existing associations.

Marxist approaches such as political economy have a preoccupation with questions of control, the uneven distribution of power and how the media is invariably related to the prevailing structure of dominant interests (McQuail, 2000:85). Locating the media within its economic context not only explains how the economy works but also the media's dynamics as a subsystem within it, clarifying where it is being driven, by whom and for what purpose. From here it is possible to see that the enlargement of the corporate domain reduces public space by imposing controls on

the flow of information, distortions towards the quality of information and enforcing a cost structure to it. An approach based on the free market inevitably exacerbates existing information gaps by disenfranchising poorer groups, while class and income remain central to understanding contemporary society (Murdock, 2000a:24).

This approach does exhibit considerable overlappings with the refeudalisation of the public sphere viewpoint because of the manner in which it sees broadcasting and its forms change through systemic pressures of a capitalist environment and the need to secure profit. It is however much more rigorous in its pursuit of the corporate activities that corrode the quality of information and utilises a wider lens through which to quantify the pernicious influence of big business. It does offer certain analytical tools with which to capture the essence of this transition and is grounded in empiricism to clarify the commercial nature of change. The fusion of the economic and the cultural which defines the remit of political economy shows that the digital revolution is chimerical in that the technological change actually generates adverse effects on the quality, range and cost of information. This position assigns cultural values to information goods and regards their decline as a direct result of commercial practises aligned to the political willingness to allow this.

To comprehend the significance of digital television then is to situate it within the real world and examine how structural factors affect it at various levels, a method which reveals continuities with the past rather than a break with it. Focusing on the technology alone does not reveal the whole picture and attention must be paid to the institutions and structures that are shaping it as well as the objectives they have. By doing so, it is apparent that the technology does not represent a major discontinuity within the system of organisation, because its very existence signals capitalism reaching maturity in its shift towards a global scale (Meiksins Wood, 1998:47). It is in the processes that this lays down that social life is marshalled in directions away from the rights of citizenry and the radical potential of technology is contained, demonstrating how the parameters of cultural life are set by processes of accumulation and dominant interests that have little regard for it. Capitalism has totally engulfed television to the extent that any unique identity it had is being steadily eradicated in the shift towards a competitive model which endeavours to further the interests of business. For this reason it seems pertinent to close this viewpoint on

Carey and Quirk's (1973:491) observation that the inability of technology to change fundamental tenets of existence and social disparities confirm that today's future is also yesterday's future.

Overview

This chapter has provided a theoretical scaffold from which the emergence and course of digital television can be charted. The various perspectives outline distinct ideas on where the medium is heading and how it is getting there, illustrating the extent to which the nature of change is contested. Each highlights different factors in its approach of how digital television is to develop, some attributing a determinacy to the technology while others express more concern with the social conditions from which the technology emanates. This resonates with McQuail's (2000:88) point that different theoretical frameworks emphasise different causes and types of change, thereby pointing to alternative paths into the future as they represent distinct philosophical positions and opposed methodological preferences.

The visions of the future function by isolating and extending certain principles of the present and differ in how the determining factors will interact for the long-term maturation of the technology. Thus, they are not just theories of what digital television is, but also prescriptions of what it should be as well as its overall social purpose by laying down conditions under which it should operate. This explains why these accounts offer varying opinions on the same issues such as the degree of regulation television needs, the significance of foreign ownership, the way the emerging medium can be utilised to guard civic rights, how audience need is conceptualised and so on.

Each viewpoint has therefore raised targeted questions to address and answer by variously positing the media-society relationship to reveal a number of opposing views on the factors driving the digitalisation process. In this way the theoretical framework is a taxonomy of claims as it reveals how a plethora of actors, ranging from those in Government, corporate, academic and popular literature circles consider

digitalisation and its significance⁴. This shows not only the interests at stake but also the particular hopes certain parties have for digital television and what they are trying to do with it. I have also tried to meet Negrine's (1994:29) stipulation of reforming media theory to incorporate changes that have transpired such as internationalisation, so as to move the focus away from the national, ethnocentrism of past media theory.

This means theory is more able to explain the contemporary world and the place of the media within it as it pays attention to the changing circumstances, which subsequently acts as a context for the technological innovations that are taking place. Overall, social theory provides a coherent system of explanation and offers a rich and practical method of understanding the contemporary world and the significance of information within it (Webster, 2002:3). From here it should be possible to guide the research process to see whether the digitalisation of television equates to a radical change for the medium, along with its likely impact in the economic, cultural, political and social spheres.

⁴ I am indebted to Professor Michael Bromley for this idea.

Chapter 6: Policy – The Need for Change?

Several parts of this thesis have already documented the pivotal role of the State in influencing the structure and character of the British broadcasting system. Government policy has historically established the institutional and ideological parameters for television by laying down an operational framework for broadcasting. The system of regulation has shaped the scope of the technology at various phases, channelling particular ideas into its formative industrial set-up and the general rules of conduct. Gibbons (1998a:4) defines regulation as a series of institutionalised routines directed towards the achievement of certain desirable ends. Regulation therefore outlines a number of specific objectives for the technology and establishes a range of mechanisms for achieving them. Policy research aims to explore the regulatory origins of technological developments, uncovering how the medium is to be organised, the basis of its funding and other core decisions that will affect the form that it initially assumes, along with the grounds for State intervention. Utilising this approach towards digital television will identify the decisions that have moulded its inaugural shape from where it will be possible to project the likely future trajectory.

While policy analysis cannot explain everything about how the new television system has evolved and the route of its development, it will highlight the intentions of a major actor, the structural design it has implemented and any other measures it has adopted to achieve prescribed goals. Policy, according to Franklin (2001:2), establishes an agenda for broadcasting and frames subsequent debate in a certain direction. This chapter sets out the Labour Government's overall plans and agenda for digital television, the ideas invoked in the construction of its aims and the mechanisms involved in achieving them. Many academics stress the importance of Government policy when attempting to fully comprehend the structure, role and objectives of broadcasting in contemporary societies, particularly in the light of

technological change (McQuail, 1992:4; Barendt, 1993:4; Hoffmann-Riem, 1996:2). These writers draw attention not only to the legal repercussions of political imperatives, but also the normative values implicit within them that are reflective of a distinct ideological position concerning the civic character of society.

Put simply, a Government's media policy and the method of regulation that it institutes determines the nature of the communications system and governs in some manner the type of information individuals can receive, potentially skewing the way they make sense of the world. As Hutchinson (1999:69) remarks "media policy is to a significant degree citizenship policy. The approach a Government takes to regulating the media tells us a great deal about the view which that Government has of its citizens and their role in society". Thus, State legislation contains within it identifiable norms that set forth an accorded role for broadcasting in the social world and denote attitudes concerning the relationship between governors and citizens. In unravelling media policy, this chapter will illuminate how citizenship has been anchored in relation to technological change.

The centrality of policy and the regulatory regime to broadcasting is well summed up by Graham and Davies (1997:2) when they advance that the communications industries are integral to democracy, yet public policy is required to create a system through which they can fulfil such capabilities. By acknowledging this civic impulse, media policy has been driven by the notion of the 'public interest' according to McQuail (1992:4), in order to guide the system of regulation towards the pursuit of democratic canons. There has been the widely accepted sentiment that the communications industries should be organised for the benefit of the people, although how this should actually figure in regards to overall structure has continually formed a major bone of contention. For Golding (1998b:9), there is no clear and cogent definition of the public interest, and this explains the tendency for different parties involved in media regulation to impose their own understanding of the term.

In practise, the application of this edict has placed certain obligations and constraints on broadcasting institutions. Feintuck (1999:91) states that regulation is comprised of the two dimensions of control and content that are designed to streamline the activities of broadcasters onto prescribed paths. The former refers to

curbing the behaviour of media firms by applying competition law to prevent the abuse of power gained through dominant status within the market. In regards to content, the public interest translates into certain concrete demands placed on the broadcasters including balance, objectivity and diversity in programming (Barendt, 1993:105). Together these two strands of regulation bestow a conceptual clarity to the practise of supervision and have been formulated to ensure the smooth running of the broadcasting sector. The public interest then is a clause intended to secure television's close affinity with citizenship through the commitments it makes of broadcasters. The extent to which this is achieved is another matter, and policy research concerns itself with evaluating the political substance of legislation to detect how effectively democratic ends have been woven into broadcasting structures.

This project has repeatedly raised the belief that digitalisation is an unprecedented development because its unique technological capabilities are laden with a series of qualities that are helping to create a more advanced communications system and, according to some, a better society. While this remains to be seen, the idea that the arrangement of the media has to be rethought to reflect and deal with new technological conditions has steadily gathered momentum in policy circles. In their discussion of a shifting regulatory approach, Collins and Murrone (1996:158) observe "changed circumstances make established institutions and instruments no longer effective". Similarly, Hoffmann-Riem (1996:350) points out that there is an identifiable trend in approaches to broadcasting to realign the aims and instruments of its regulation, along with the means of achieving them, in tune with changing goals. How this perceived need for change has arisen and its effect towards reforming systems and processes will be detailed.

Franklin's (2001:15) point that broadcasting's evolution reveals a continuity in policy preoccupations across phases through which an array of 'perennial issues' are played out is particularly relevant here. Do the thematic concerns, detailed in other parts of this thesis and which have featured so prominently in broadcasting's history, still have validity in an age of digitalisation? For Steemers (1998a:2), the questions that have traditionally concerned broadcasting policy will remain as centrally important for converged media though in a more complex form. Thus, it is vital to detail how public service, ownership, the role of foreign investment and diffusion

amongst many other issues are to be conceptualised in the new circumstances. It will become apparent why these themes have to be rethought and dealt with in accordance with the nuances of a widespread degree of technological change that many believe imposes certain departures from the orthodoxies of the analogue age. Detailing the management of these old and new issues in terms of policy directives and regulatory structure will illuminate the emerging contours of the digital television landscape and reveal its ideological underpinnings.

The Information Society

The Government's plans concerning new communications technologies have been spelt out in a series of legislative documents, consultative reports and policy statements leading up to the 2003 Communications Act. Collectively, these papers directly express an array of ideas on the primacy of the communications system in the modern world together with plans to organise its structural parameters. It is impossible to cover all of these issues in great depth so I have drawn attention to the themes which correlate closely with the foci of this study and which impinge on the development of digital television. At the nucleus of Labour thinking is the recurring notion that digital technologies are instigating a major social upheaval:

The explosion of information has fuelled a democratic revolution of knowledge and active citizenship. If information is power, power can now be within the grasp of everyone. No Government can now rely on the ignorance of its population to sustain it. We are richer as citizens thanks to the expansion of modern media. This Government wants to encourage this and give everyone access to all these riches as quickly as possible (DCMS/DTI, 2000:8).

New communications technologies are repeatedly framed as a fundamentally positive development because their logic is thought to instigate an emerging democratic and economic landscape that transforms social life in positive ways. The ubiquity and capabilities of electronic communications, aligned to the applicability in numerous spheres, has led some commentators to claim that an intrinsically different type of society is being formed. Several commentators (McQuail, 2000:121; van Dijk, 1999:247; Mackay, 2001:1; Melody, 1990:16) explain that this invokes the idea of the

information society as an overarching framework for understanding the unfolding changes associated with the communications sector¹.

The proliferation in information is thought to induce a series of ruptures across disparate parts of civic life, with the repercussions being felt in regards to knowledge, employment, politics, and leisure along with many other areas of human existence. Indeed, Government rhetoric advances how the modern age is dependent on information because its presence simultaneously holds cultural and economic weight (DTI/DfEE, 2001:1.2). Information then is perceived to be the raw material of our time given its significance to social life, and its pertinence culminates in what Webster (2002:2) calls an axial importance to the modern world. Information is increasingly thought to define the society we live in, thus occupying an emblematic role to reinforce its material and cultural centrality. While there are sharp disagreements on how to exactly conceptualise an information society (van Dijk, 1999; Hall, 2001; Webster, 2002), with certain academics rejecting the term altogether (Lax, 1997:119), it has nonetheless become a major organizing principle for the Government in its approach towards the communications sector².

Government discourses stress the need to create a high-tech, knowledge based society based on the exploitation of information as a key element of modernisation and wealth accumulation (DCMS, 2002:6). This has resulted in the move towards a unified information policy to deal with the issues this engenders, observable in the particular approach and plans of action designed around the special functions of information. Indeed, Mosco (1996:13) reasons that if information is a key resource, specific attention must be paid to the circumstances of its production, the methods of its distribution and the consequences of its allocation. It is imperative then for Government to devise initiatives that utilise the potential of information and its attendant industries fully in order to spread its benefits universally. As Melody (1990:28) observes, adjustments to a society in which information plays a more central role requires changes to existing laws. Therefore, rules governing the analogue

¹ 'Broadband Britain', the 'Wired World' and the 'Knowledge Economy' are other terms used interchangeably to convey the same principle.

² I am not going to enter into the information society debate as that has been comprehensively covered elsewhere. The point is that the belief in its existence is being used to inform and marshal the Government's communication policies.

media industries are being overhauled to accommodate what is perceived to be the increased significance of information in social life.

Given that the media propel the information explosion, their place within the emerging social system becomes more pronounced as they assume the essential role of disseminating the core currency of this age. The Government expresses this idea when stating that “our society is increasingly woven together by electronic communication” (DCMS/DTI, 2000:9). The effect of this is to confer increased importance on the communication industries for their ability to connect the nation’s composite elements more effectively when linking institutions, industries and individuals via electronic networks. It is the shift to a *digital* media system however that convinces many that the information society is actually being attained, because the properties of these technologies increase the volume of information and the speed of its circulation markedly as compared to analogue. Hancock (1998:125) captures this sentiment when observing how many see the digital revolution as a crucial step towards the information society. Digital technology then is perceived to have an unequivocal impact on modern life to the extent that it transforms the social system and improves the lives of citizens in a manner that extends beyond simply altering the communication of information.

The belief in the information society advances from the thought that the realm of everyday life is in the process of being digitalised to the effect that it is possible to execute routine activities through communications networks. For instance, individuals can now work, shop, bank and interact with friends via new communications technologies. The pertinence of the Internet, mobile telephony and digital television therefore lies in their applicability to several spheres from which they can help individuals in any number of everyday tasks. The e-envoy’s website (2001) makes clear how these tools permit people to interact in novel ways from the comfort of their own homes³. By accelerating the velocity of information digital technologies subsequently open up a multitude of possibilities such as electronic Government, working from home, instant public services and linkages to health facilities. The

³ The Government appointed an ‘electronic envoy’ Andrew Pinder from 2001 until 2004 to ensure the country derived the maximum benefit from digital technologies.

increases in information are thought to lead to a potent shift in the cultural conditions of life as different ways of existence come into being in a world of information plenty (DCMS/DTI, 2000:8). The Government feels the emerging digital communications environment encompasses a whole new lifestyle of connectivity and convenience derived from the instantaneous and readily available flow of information.

The Government regards digital technology as an intrinsically robust method of improving interaction between Government institutions, citizens and businesses, to the effect that it will ultimately make public services more accessible and modernise the system of governance (e-envoy, 2002:11). Electronic channels integrate disparate elements of the political system by delivering information rapidly to forge a direct line of communication between them. For these reasons, in March 2000, the Prime Minister pledged to make all central and local Government services electronically available through the UK Online initiative (e-envoy, 2001). Since then it has sought to develop an Internet portal around the needs of citizens with a user friendly interface, easy navigational format and secure base for transactions. The UK Online project aims to improve the speed of Government services and ease their use by reaching people through the Internet, a strategy that relies on exploiting the network possibilities it holds in regards to information exchange. In doing so, it is envisaged that a closer and more transparent relationship between Government and citizens will develop through improved communication channels (e-envoy, 2002:3).

While information has been framed as pivotal to social relations in the modern world, unequal access to it is likely to constitute the major source of social disparity. The problems of the digital divide have been illuminated earlier and in this light Sourbati (2004:587) observes the availability of media services is more than ever before a precondition for participation in social, economic and civic activity. The Government has stated its awareness and aims of avoiding the danger of a knowledge gap opening up between information 'haves' and 'have nots' through devising measures to ensure information circulates freely and is obtainable for all (DCMS/DTI, 1998:13). This theme has been repeatedly addressed in policy documents, buttressed by the commitment to securing universal penetration of the Internet by 2005 (DCMS/DTI, 2000; e-envoy, 2001; DCMS, 2002; e-envoy, 2003a). The Government sees the provision of electronic communications as an integral element of its duties to

citizens in order to guarantee that no-one is excluded at a time when there is a huge dependency on such technologies, enabling all to benefit from the accompanying opportunities they bring.

Government plans have concentrated on widening access to the Internet across a multiplicity of channels such as public libraries, public kiosks, Internet cafes, mobile devices, digital television and online resource centres (e-envoy, 2002:18). The locations referred to are open to all, so increasing their number and placing computers in them has formed the principal method of securing ubiquitous access. Moreover, the abundance of such places in recent years is a deliberate attempt to ensure that no-one is ever going to be too far from the Internet to utilise it (e-envoy, 2003a:4). This scheme has created a readily available entry point into the digital universe for those without computers at home or work, enabling people to gain literacy in this vital area. Policy has progressively targeted deprived communities where the uptake of information technologies has been traditionally low, through the renting out of computers to poorer income families at reduced cost (DCMS/DTI, 2000:29). The underlying thought is to bring all into the information society by recognising where obstacles lie before acting to overcome them. The Government has continually monitored overall progress and drawn up contingency plans for any short-falls in reaching the 2005 mark through employing surveys and questionnaires to evaluate take-up (e-envoy, 2001). The 2003 UK Online Annual Report (e-envoy, 2003a:5) cites from independent research when stating how 96% of the population are aware of where they can easily reach the Internet and that public access points are regularly being used in target areas.

It seems apparent from this data that widespread diffusion of the Internet is in the process of being achieved and that its penetration in disadvantaged areas is a result of the commitment and energy the Government has devoted to take-up. However, Sourbati (2004:587) explains questions of access pertain not only to the availability of media services, but also to the acquisition of skills and competencies that render meaningful service use. The task then is not simply to get every individual and community connected, but to furnish them with the expertise necessary to harness the full array of benefits the technology offers. Mackay (2001:103) argues that computing

literacy is essential to a society defined in relation to information in the equivalent manner that the basic literacy of reading and writing is to the industrial age.

The Government is sensitive to this need and has developed skills programmes to help those without experience gain confidence and proficiency in computing. The *Learn Direct* scheme has offered free taster courses for unemployed people and discounted training for those on low incomes (DCMS/DTI, 2000:29). This emphasis on learning has also led to a greater focus on information technology in schools, whereby it will form an increasingly integral component of the National Curriculum (ibid.). The objective is to place computers at the heart of the education process by making them routine classroom tools to be applied across all disciplines, rather than being conceived as a separate subject. The IT proficiency of children should progressively increase throughout their schooling because of the centralised nature of computers to the entire learning experience.

The Government's plans for new technologies can best be summed up as a concerted effort to modernise political structures with the purpose of forging a more inclusive type of digital citizenship that redefines the nature of the relationship between governors and governed (e-envoy, 2002:3). Furthermore, the intention to foster a horizontal flow of information, its even dispersal throughout society and the need to endow everyone with the ability to use it fully all emphasise the extent to which the Government believes society is knowledge driven. Accordingly, a number of measures have been designed to avert a parallel form of social exclusion taking root in the new circumstances by focusing chiefly on the need to achieve full civic participation through access to information technology.

Recently, the Government has claimed it has successfully secured the physical availability of the Internet for the vast majority of the population and is therefore shifting its attention to raising the computing skills of the elderly and those on low incomes through further training (e-envoy, 2003a:5). The aim is to familiarise them so that they can progress towards online transactions with Government, thereby achieving a form of direct engagement that has always been difficult to secure with these groups (ibid.). Implementing digital technology across society has been framed

as an effective method for reaching people who have sometimes had little contact with the political process.

However, the latest research (CO/DTI, 2005:8) illustrates that a digital divide between the information rich and poor within this country still exists and that efforts to close it have not succeeded. The report shows that there are significant differences between income groups in relation to whether they can access the Internet at home or in public settings, as well as major differences in regards to which income groups use the technology at all. It confirms that geographical ubiquity has not been matched socially because a disproportionately high amount of people from low income groups are not benefiting from the technology (Pesola, 2005:3). The report reveals that socio-economic groups A and B are three times more likely to have Internet access at home as compared to those from D and E, and that the rate of increase in recent years has occurred almost entirely amongst A, B and C1 groups (CO/DTI, 2005:24). The data support the idea that certain groups are being marginalised from the information society. Motivation, lack of perceived need and interest were uncovered by the research as the main barriers to increasing penetration (*ibid.*26), and as Pesola (2005:3) points out, these are difficult issues to resolve. The differential skew of diffusion shows that while the Government may champion this technology, serious matters need to be addressed if the fundamental objectives of creating an information society are to be met.

The cultural worth of digital technologies is augmented by the economic potential simultaneously imbued within them that is seen to signal a fundamental shift in the operations of the economy. Information, and the communications system in general, presently occupies a pivotal role within all business enterprises. As Mackay (2001:100) observes, information technology is an effective method to connect separate parts of the commercial chain, linking suppliers, producers and consumers to embellish a more direct trading relationship that benefits all in terms of convenience. Indeed, early on its first administration, the Labour Government recognised how a variety of industries are now dependent on digital communication channels in their daily operations (DCMS/DTI, 1998:7). The technology advances the efficiency of a multitude of sectors such as finance, retailing and travel amongst many others because

of its ability to process and exchange data instantly, from where the speed and competitiveness of the services offered improve.

The fiscal significance of digital technology penetrates much deeper however than simply transforming industrial practises because its pertinence is thought to revolutionize the underlying character of the economy and its material core. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI, 2004) claims electronic communications are responsible for a greater proportion of the nation's wealth and are central to the operations of the economy because they disseminate its primary commodity of information. Such thinking is indicative of how information is perceived to have an increasingly determinant role in an emerging economy that trades on its weightless attributes, rather than the physical matter of the heavy industries that typified the industrial age.

The Government feels information has become the raw material and commodity of our times to the extent that its creation and generation forms the main area of economic activity (DTI, 1998:2). The economy is therefore shifting from a dependence on physical assets to one in which firms in the information and service sectors hold the key to national prosperity, particularly as they have grown as a result of society's reliance on communication channels. This is reflected in a concomitant rise in the number of people employed in such professions and the overall trading patterns visible in today's world. Indeed, in December 2001 creative employment in the UK totalled 1.95 million jobs (DCMS, 2002:13). Meanwhile, Griffiths (2004) explains that this means higher levels of profit because it denotes the next stage in the migration of skills.

The Government has therefore targeted the information sector for the vital contributions it makes to national prosperity, progressing from the sentiment that it is integral to the way the economy functions. It feels the centrality of information in today's world affects the range of goods and services produced, the way firms behave and how they are organised (DTI, 1998:29). Moreover, there is a growing proportion of the economy that depends on the performance of companies involved in activities that are based essentially around information products. In 2000, the 'creative industries' accounted for 7.9% of GDP and grew considerably faster than the

economy as a whole (DCMS, 2002:3). These professions, including advertising, the arts, architecture, film and video, television and radio, music, software and computer services, publishing and interactive leisure software are seen to represent the main activities in the current circumstances and are decisive for securing prosperity.

The Government (DTI, 1998:3) feels that the amount and type of knowledge embodied within the goods and services of these professions denotes the value of their products, as opposed to the amount of labour expended in their construction that typified production practises within the heavy industries of the previous age. The information basis of wealth means standardised production procedures can no longer be applied to the manufacture of goods because ideas and creative nous are needed to harness the intangible potential of information. The nature of these occupations as driven by knowledge dictates the need for a more imaginative commercial mind-set in the formulation of offerings and in identifying potential consumer services and uncovering new markets.

The Trade Secretary of the time, Patricia Hewitt (2004), explained that current circumstances are driven by “companies with their origin in creativity, skill, talent and whose principal route to wealth and job creation is through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property”. The manner in which the creative industries utilise knowledge in their development of information services is thought to ultimately determine the rate of economic growth and the standard of living because of its material pertinence to wealth accumulation. To assist corporate endeavours the British Government is encouraging its firms to engage in a global strategy in information markets with the aim of becoming a world leader (DCMS, 2002:23). The worldwide nature of trading and the ease of information transfer are consequences of a technology that easily transcends borders and is indicative of the growing economic importance of such industries. Information is far more easily transported than any other goods in an already globalised trading system, leaving no nation immune to the forces of competition.

The notion of rapid change permeates Government discourses, with the understanding that it is essential to be part of an emerging wealth system in its formative stages, rather than allowing other nations to gain a first-mover advantage

that may be difficult to overcome (Hewitt, 2004). Therefore, developing enlarged markets in the creative industries is a crucial measure towards gaining an international competitive advantage. Britain currently earns £1,361 million a year from exporting communications services and has major industrial strengths in many areas of the sector (DCMS/DTI, 2000:9). The task for Government then is to assist in the development of initiatives in the information sector that build on these strengths to further buttress industrial strength, enabling domestic companies to steer themselves towards a global consumer base.

The Government has identified the market as the mandatory mechanism for harnessing the potential of digital technologies through its wealth creating powers and presumed ability to launch domestic players onto the world stage. The DTI (2004) sums up the intended formula towards digital media as “opening up competition, removing unnecessary burdens on businesses and streamlining the regulatory environment”. The aim is to have a free market in which private enterprise thrives through competition, resulting in consumers having a multiplicity of choices at competitive prices. Furthermore, the creative ability firms require to thrive in a knowledge driven economy is thought to be attainable only through entrepreneurial endeavour (Hewitt, 2004). It is believed that the current era demands originality and that this can be most effectively unearthed through the profit motive. For this reason, the Government sees its own role in the communications industry as minimalist, focusing primarily on erecting the legal framework of competition that should allow private communications firms to engage in a fair contest for consumers (DCMS/DTI, 2000:15). Protectionism and regulation are seen to run counter to the logic of the time that stresses a need for ingenuity and insight. It is advanced that such qualities cannot flourish in the light of heavy controls, eradicating the need for undue regulation apart from those safeguards that maintain strict adherence to competition law.

However, it must be pointed out that the digital ‘revolution’ is being pushed by the Government because the movement towards this communication system has not been achieved through the mass response of audiences to a series of innovations. Rather, New Labour has been proactive in creating the digital communications terrain by supporting it with public money whilst simultaneously advancing a rhetorical commitment to a free market that conversely relies upon being directly stimulated by

consumer wants. The end result is a regulated market that has been organised from above towards particular political objectives. This exhibits a serious contradiction in regulatory approach because it reveals conflicting ideas in the construction of the policy and a need to initiate change for desired outcomes whilst using public money to create a communications system that has not been demand led.

Furthermore, convergence has been seized upon as a corporate opportunity for domestic firms to develop into the multifaceted players that already pepper the global business arena (DCMS/DTI, 1998:14). Chapter Four highlighted how a convergent media system raises the prospect of the enlargement of its firms by enabling them to take advantage of the common technological application of digitalisation to infiltrate other sectors with prime content. The British Government feels the structural change this engenders is an imperative condition for repositioning domestic firms into the international trading system and preparing them to compete effectively with the large transnational corporations who already thrive in such markets (DTI, 1998:3). The deregulation of the communications industries has been instituted then as a response to the evolving knowledge economy, with the objective of allowing companies to spread their operations and grow in size, from where they should be fully equipped to secure a competitive advantage for the nation.

It is not entirely clear how such measures would benefit *British* companies because the consequences could well turn out to be counter-productive. Opening up the communications system by relaxing ownership controls raises the danger of a concentration in ownership rather than increasing the number of suppliers because it enables successful players to spread their influence into sectors from which they were previously excluded. Smaller firms face the possibility of being subsumed by those from other parts of the industry who have the financial power to out-muscle them. More worryingly, lifting such restrictions enables existing large global conglomerates, particularly those from the USA, to buy into British television with the distinct possibility of output becoming more culturally removed from its audience base while the financial benefits accrue to competitors. So, while the motivation of gaining first mover advantage may lie at the heart of these deregulatory moves, the reality is that pre-eminent positions have already been established in the global market-place by

non-UK firms. These measures therefore sanction the take-over of British communications by larger foreign companies.

Since the communications system has presently acquired a more pronounced economic character, the Government recognises that the vocational skills necessary to secure the material wealth of the nation are IT centred. It has therefore encouraged training schemes in the workplace to maintain standards of expertise, supported by online learning programmes designed to update occupational abilities (DCMS/DTI, 2000:9). A knowledge driven economy dictates the need for perpetual innovation in the information industries that nourishes it. To achieve complete mastery of the technology the Government has committed itself to continual investment in the research and development of digital media and a number of seminars with industry members to further explore market possibilities (DTI, 1998:7). Also, the greater importance attached to information and knowledge requires clarity in the rules of innovation and the rights to the ownership of intellectual property. Thus, the Government has intimated that there will be a tightening up of the laws concerning the patenting of ideas and intellectual property (Hewitt, 2004). As creative originality is now a requirement for economic success, it is imperative that individuals and companies can innovate in favourable conditions where the rewards are clearly defined. Overall, the framework of light regulation for the knowledge economy is to be strongly entrenched where measures are required, namely in regards to instituting fair competition, preserving individual rights and advancing the needs of private endeavour (DTI, 2004).

All of this demonstrates that the notion of an information society and its prominent placement in Government documentation connotes a sense of civic and economic life on the cusp of a major structural transformation, where human existence is in the process of being propelled unremittingly into a technologically rich era whose benefits are immense and widespread. Garnham (2000:19) clarifies how the information society has become the dominant ideology of our time, influencing and justifying the actions of business and politicians whilst also shaping the common sense understanding of our times. It is conceived as a new stage in human history as the impact of the digital communications environment is believed to impel a complete societal infrastructure that permeates the entire nation and beyond with profound

consequences. Government discourses suggest digital communications technologies will have a comparable effect on the economy and society to that exerted by railways in the nineteenth century (DTI/DCMS, 2000:23). Social and economic resources can however be readily transported on the communications networks with greater ease as compared to the physical system of railways and roads that served a similarly transformative purpose for industrial Britain. Thus, digital technology is to form the arteries and support system of the modern world, connecting all in a manner that supersedes the previous historical phase, culminating in a defining role in regards to the way society functions.

Van Dijk (1999:222) describes how the new media channels act not just as conduits for communication, but as social environments in themselves by enabling unique forms of interaction to take place. The pervasive nature of these constructed spaces and the communication possibilities they generate has formed the chief basis for the enthusiastic rhetoric. Indeed, Mackay (2001:18) points out how digital media reconfigure time and space to the extent that these factors become less significant in the shaping of social organisation and interaction. Such potency explains the place of new communication technologies in the modern world, distinguishing this era from its predecessor that was defined by its own dependence on industry. Murphie and Potts (2003:61) outline how this thinking is engaged in a periodization of history where epochs are separated by their radical differences with the past, when a series of discontinuities signify 'paradigm shifts' as society is thought to change in a comprehensive manner.

Hence, the information society is perceived to represent a novel stage in human history, distinct from earlier periods that were characterised by their own motifs of agriculture and heavy industry. Both of these periods exhibited particular types of social system that were fixed in scope by the dynamics of their age, reliant upon farms or factories as the origins of productivity through which such locations acted as the primary nodes of social life. Just as agriculture and industry created forms of existence that were shaped by the unique imperatives of each age, the information society is believed to potentially instil a new social and economic formation separate in character from those previous to it.

Digitalisation then occupies a central component of the Government's plans in its approach towards governance, wealth accumulation and the organisation of civic life because the idea of the information society provides a concrete direction and set of targets for the deployment of the technology. It is the double-edged impact attributed to digital media that has driven policy in accordance with a vision of the future. Indeed, the communication plans are the joint work of the two Departments of Trade and Industry, and Media, Culture and Sport who point out that while they may come from different perspectives, they have shared ideas on the role of communications in the modern world, structured around the need to balance social and industrial objectives (DCMS/DTI, 2000:3). This has meant identifying certain factors in the pursuit of wider goals, namely securing universal access and fortifying the competitiveness of the sector. Paradoxically then, the prescribed goals have created the need for Government to drive change despite its insistence on the need to reduce State involvement in the communications sector.

In his discussion of communications policy, Wheeler (2001:30) finds the dual purpose invested in the technology is designed to appeal to different interest groups within Government and industry, indicative of Labour's 'Third Way' ideology. Thus, it is the fusion of economic and cultural aims through digital technology that characterises the Government's approach and objectives for the communications sector as a means to utilise the benefits of the market whilst avoiding its shortcomings. Melody (1990:26) observes now that economic and social activities are increasingly technology intensive, an integrated policy strategy that addresses them is more viable. Overall, the Government has adopted a proactive approach towards the communication industries in its efforts to form a technologically saturated and more inclusive society, which revolve around instituting the conditions that enable all to gain from the explosion in information before allowing the market to work its logic. The Government's sees its own role then as helping the information society take root by its commitment to the creation and dispersal of knowledge.

Digital Television and the Information Society

If society is undergoing a transformation through the pervasiveness and power of digital technology, what place does television have within it? Venturelli (1998:233) argues that a particular conception of broadcasting policies emerges from the general theory of how society should be organised at the current time. In other words, the development of the information age lays down a number of demands for how social resources are to be managed to the extent that a concrete direction is given to them through this overarching aim. Given the cultural centrality and ubiquity of television, it could be used in line with wider plans of accelerating change. Indeed, theorists have claimed that digital television is likely to be one of the corner stones of the information society (Humphreys and Lang 1998:125; Papathanassopoulos, 2002:250; Graham and Davies, 1997:52). Thus, the manner in which the information society has been conceptualised structures the political arrangements for digital television, before prescribing the medium a number of duties from where it can most capably assist in the formation of such a situation.

The Labour Government has embraced digital television fully throughout its period of office, emphasising its commitment through regular public announcements, consultation exercises and policy documents. In 2001, they released the Digital Television Action Plan (DAP, 2001) outlining their reasons for its adoption, the range of issues involved in the transition to a digital broadcasting system and an accompanying timetable of action. To begin with, the Government have repeatedly drawn attention to how digital television offers a multitude of advantages in terms of the services and breadth of choice it raises, and, according to the Culture, Media and Sport Secretary, for the fact that it revolutionizes the whole viewing experience (Jowell, 2003). They strenuously extol the technological superiority over analogue (as explained in Chapter Four), stressing that there is no point in audiences being deprived of the best possible broadcasting service. For this reason, they want “every home to be able to enjoy the present and future benefits of digital television” (DCMS/DTI, 2001), an eventuality that calls for its rapid diffusion.

The Government's entrenched support for digital television reveals much deeper roots however, relying on the transition as a means to achieve the fundamental objectives associated with the information society, because the medium becomes integral to the rolling out of the essential infrastructure of a technologically saturated social system. Engaging with the policy literature constantly raises the desirability of using it as an entry-point to the Internet, and by extension, as a method of connecting citizens with Government:

It is the Government's vision that DTV becomes a means to provide all citizens with access to e-government services. It offers citizens the opportunity to engage with Government in a new way, through a device they already trust and feel comfortable with – their television (e-envoy, 2003b:17).

The medium opens up a conduit for electronic Government services, serving as a principal method of achieving some of the civic elements that underscore the ideological dimensions of the information society. It is the interactive nature of the medium that has been seized upon as multiplying the opportunities for political engagement, providing those without home access to a PC a convenient and easily available line of communication with Government and each other (e-envoy, 2002:18).

It is believed that digital television will get people online to utilise the information resources of the Internet so that the benefits associated with being technologically literate become realisable. While certain digital television packages do open up access to the Internet, the intention seems to be more focused around the 'walled gardens' of the digital television portal per se for accessing political services. Indeed, Government rhetoric advocates the use of the medium because of its potential ability to reach all strata of society, thereby prising open avenues of civic engagement for the disenfranchised by utilising its position of prominence in the living room (e-envoy, 2003b:16). So, digital television constitutes the chief means of fulfilling the core Labour objective of having an empowered and technologically astute citizenry.

A number of Government departments have devised pilot schemes for their facilities on the UK Online Interactive portal that launched in April 2002, which now has a growing presence on digital television. These are described in the e-envoy's report (2003b:12-16) at length, illuminating how various local and central

Government initiatives have been devised to make a range of functions available from such a single access point. The Department of Work and Pensions site enables people to gather information on this topic and enquire directly with any queries relating to employment issues. The Department of Health has conducted a number of pilot schemes such as *Living Health* on the cable platform in Birmingham. This site provided access to NHS accredited information and advice 24 hours a day, whilst also allowing users to browse more than 21,000 pages of NHS-accredited health information and advice, enabling patients to book appointments with their GP's.

Also, the Department for Education and Skills has announced plans for an independent digital television channel catering for those involved in the education profession. *Teachers TV* launched in late 2004, aims to support teachers, provide training and development resources, tips and best practices, and the latest news to affect the education sector (DfES, 2003). Similarly, a number of local councils are making their services available on the cable platform via the serving company with information on housing, refuse collection, council tax and other such community matters readily obtainable for residents. However, industry insider Griffiths (2004) doubts whether digital television can achieve these objectives in anything other than a limited way. He feels that the asymmetrical nature of the medium means that the 'out' is bigger than the 'in' so that the return line is very small, leaving very little opportunity for users to input information into such applications.

All of this reveals the importance of digital television to the current Government. The e-envoy (2002:3) sums up the civic worth by stressing that this is a technology that can organise the public sector around the needs of citizens, making its services more accessible, convenient and responsive than any other alternative. Digital television is intended to become the chief method of reaching individuals in these new times, operating as a connecting conduit with Government through the trust and penetration garnered by the medium in its analogue phase. With television acting as the gateway to the digital universe, the medium assumes a greater social primacy in that it forms the electronic hub from which users can fully partake in the information society. The Government sees its own task as making itself electronically available by putting all its departments online, before integrating these with relevant programme content and continuously monitoring the usability of its services with an eye to

improving them to ensure television becomes the most pervasive Government-to-citizen channel (e-envoy, 2003b:6). The Digital Television Action Plan (DAP, 2001) meanwhile addresses the issue of technical standards, to guarantee that the full array of services are available on the separate platforms.

Digital television also has a primary industrial role to play in the information society largely because it is believed that its technological capabilities engender certain conditions more conducive to enhancing the economic performance of the sector. Recalling the Government's purpose of developing the 'creative industries' as a major source of wealth accumulation in the modern world, broadcasting comprises one such branch and figures show that this area grew by an average of 10% per annum between 1997 to 2000, compared to an average of 2.8% for the whole of the economy over this period (DCMS, 2002:12). The television industry has a potentially critical role in the electronic driven system of commerce because it trades in the 'weightless bits' of programming, the success of which depends upon those benchmarks of the knowledge economy - ingenuity and originality. In its White Paper *Opportunity for all in a world of change*, the Government declared it intended "for the UK to have the most dynamic and competitive market for digital television in the G7, as measured by take up, choice and cost" (DTI/DfEE, 2001:4.53). The objective is for the nation to be a world leader in digital television because of the financial gain and employment creating powers a vibrant sector would bring. To illustrate its promise, Britain earned £700 million through the export of broadcasting content in 2000, while the industry formed 0.5% of the total Gross Domestic Product (DCMS, 2002:13).

The demands of international success call for the industrial reinforcement of domestic firms in order to bolster their competitiveness from where they should be able to secure a healthy trade surplus for the nation. Digitalisation is thought to grant this opportunity because of its ability to let new entrants into the broadcasting arena, from where competition should thrive to maximise audience choice (DCMS/DTI, 2001). The central aim of the Government's digital television policy then is to achieve a flourishing market and this theme permeates many of their discourses, directly or implicitly, as the fundamental priority of going digital. Collins (2002a:7) clarifies that the Government is supporting digitalisation as part of its general commitment to increasing competition, which in turn is understood to enlarge choice and diversity

because of the efficiencies in spectrum use that accompany such a shift. Another issue to consider though is how effectively the BBC fits into this deregulated environment given its status as a public broadcaster. While the Government has supported the Corporation's existence, the presence of such a player belies all the objectives of creating a deregulated industry and means the framework has not thought out all the concerns consistently because the BBC's place in the digital future means the market cannot be 'free'.

A digital broadcasting system is conceived as the method for achieving a free market in television because it releases spectrum for the development of new services and opens up the field to more players, whose tendencies to fight for viewers will benefit the latter in terms of price and quality. The assumption in the Government's approach is that a free market will improve the broadcasting industry's competitive position, giving its companies the springboard from which to take on international rivals (DTI/DfEE, 2001:4.52). The economic priorities of the nation are seen as synonymous with securing the sovereignty of individuals, as both are contingent upon a competitive framework, a reasoning that has been invoked as the justification for the ongoing deregulation of the sector. Yet, at the same time, digital television has progressed because of Government promotion through the needs it has set out for the medium. It is highly unlikely that it would have advanced in a free market manner without the diffusion programme set out for it and State backing that got it started at the specific moment it did.

The political plans for the new television exhibit a familiar parallel to those concerning digital technology more generally, illuminating a coherence in regards to the aims set out but also the same contradictions in terms of general approach. Such aims mean there is an urgent need for the swift take-up of digital television in the Government's policy because of the democratic duties ascribed to it and for its potential economic value (DCMS/DTI, 2001). Television in its digital incarnation therefore becomes a key element of the emerging society, symbolic of the changes going on but also a crucial contributor to them, with the identical goals transposed on to it to which it assumes a primary responsibility. As the Government promulgates, "digital television promises much greater participation in the information society – with the attendant economic and social benefits" (e-envoy, 2003b:6). While the notion

of the information society demands that television satisfy a number of objectives, the progression towards this state can be gauged by the developments within the medium, with it acting as a reference point on which to map and evaluate the advancements made. Thus, it will be possible to identify if information society targets are being fulfilled by monitoring how effectively digital television has become a civic channel and by clarifying its economic worth to the nation. The remainder of this chapter will outline the political framework being instituted for digital television in order to highlight how this emblematic industry is being set up, from where its symbolic, civic and material contributions to the broader shifts can be unravelled.

Regulation

While the general aims for digital television have been outlined, it remains to be seen how these are to be achieved, given that the goals have to be enunciated through a particular regulatory apparatus that should make them realisable. Gibbons (1998a:13) confirms that the design of a regulatory scheme is contingent upon the purposes set out for it, which in relation to the media broadly pertains to the distribution of knowledge. However, regulation must also establish the grounds for dealing with the perceived negative aspects of the media, so that corrective measures can be applied when the institutions fail or when its potency is abused. The magnitude attached to any particular sector has shaped its supervisory structure as has the belief of whether it can fulfil the 'public interest' of its own accord, or if it needs substantial intervention to direct it there. Barendt (1993:42) draws attention to a delicate paradox in that while the media's independence should be protected because of its close affinity with free speech, the imposition of heavy controls for democratic purposes could of themselves be seen as antithetical to its autonomy. The task therefore has been to create a system in which media institutions can operate freely with the grounds for intervention clearly defined.

Regulation of the media in Britain has hitherto been a splintered affair, with numerous authorities responsible for the supervision of particular sectors, diverging widely from media to media owing to the fact that distinct ideas have been applied to each. Consequently, the communications industry had been comprised of a mixture of

bodies which would exercise various degrees of power over their own territory in the pursuit of specific objectives. Such a system was:

a reflection of the way communications developed in the twentieth century, with different content and distribution channels. There are nine separate regulators covering television and radio and telecommunications, with different regulators covering issues of taste and decency, and economics and competition (DCMS/DTI, 2000:11).

As the separate media were formed at a range of historical moments and through particular technological characteristics, each was subject to a regulator formulated to deal with them alone, visible in the manner in which the analogue age had an assortment of authorities who would supervise each industry separately. This ad hoc and reactive strategy, as Feintuck (1999:190) calls it, meant each sector was channelled towards certain goals by at least one authority through the ancillary set of mechanisms it wielded. Golding (1998b:12) feels such an arrangement was indicative of “an unholy mess reflecting no clear philosophy about the role of the media in public life”. The regulatory system was devoid of a coherent set of ideas to bind the communications industries together in the pursuit of a common aim in such a way that it was unclear to identify the media’s overall purpose.

The current thrust of deep-seated change in the communications industry and its centrality to social life, has motivated the Government to reassess the system of regulation. The idea of formulating a unified body to deal with the converging nature of the media first surfaced in its White Paper *A Future for Communications* (DCMS/DTI, 2000:77), which set the tone for a ‘super-regulator’ as a method of devising a simpler and more flexible regime. The justification for this can be found in the manner in which the old framework was ill-equipped to deal with the increasingly prevalent phenomena of cross-over, where companies would spill over into markets that previously they were unable to enter. The problem here, as explained by the website of Ten Downing Street (2002) was of ‘double-jeopardy’, whereby multiple activities would be subjected to two different authorities in parallel, occasionally leading to alternative rulings, or conversely, when there would be problems in locating responsibility.

Therefore, the Government has felt that it is the unique logic attributed to digitalisation that demands a new approach to the regulation of the communications industries. Wheeler (2001:29) argues sector specific definitions are less appropriate because markets are no longer segregated, a trend that calls for regulation to be more responsive to the actual industrial conditions. A communications sector in which the inter-relationships between media are becoming closer calls for a similarly integrated agency to deal with the issues such changes engender. From the mid-1990's a plethora of voices within Government, industry and academia reasoned that digitalisation required a reconfigured regulatory apparatus to reflect and deal with the particularities it imposes⁴. Collins and Murrioni (1996:174) have argued compellingly in favour of a single regulator because it enables the development of a holistic media strategy by applying consistent measures across the whole field of communications, an approach that should also speed up the whole process of supervision.

Efforts have concentrated on the formation of a unified Office of Communications which reflects the new circumstances and to which it can most effectively execute its main duties. Given that economic and cultural aims have been simultaneously prescribed as primary targets of the information society, a single body should simplify regulatory matters and be better positioned to assist in the drive to create it. Put simply, an integrated approach to communications regulation is deemed necessary because of the converging nature of the media and for it to carry out the full range of tasks now required of it (e-envoy, 2003a:20).

The Government moved quickly on this, reflecting the importance bestowed to the communications sector and the hopes invested towards it. The website of 10 Downing Street released a fact sheet (2002) listing how the new regulator came about and the full range of its powers. It is impossible to detail all of the debates involved in its gestation and its entire set of statutory duties, so I will focus on the broad issue of its role. Creating OFCOM has involved combining the functions of the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC), the Independent Television Commission (ITC), the Office of Telecommunications (OFTEL), the Radio Authority (RA) and the Radio Communications Agency (RCA) to cover both content and network matters

⁴ While there have been debates about the kind of approach it should take, the only argument I can find against a converged regulator is advanced by Gibbons (1998b:93).

(DCMS/DTI, 2000:78). This has given it responsibility over television, radio, telecommunications and the management of the spectrum, with the power to act as a single body dealing with issues that cut across all of these areas. The Office of Communications Act, which came into force in March 2002, enabled the Government to establish OFCOM, while the much larger 2002 Communications Bill and 2003 Communications Act endowed it with its full authority (Ten Downing Street, 2002). OFCOM became operational on schedule at the end of 2003, and has since churned out a wealth of research on the evolving nature of the media industry.

OFCOM has been established to be independent from Government but will work closely with The Department of Culture, Media and Sport as well as the Department of Trade and Industry. The priorities of the new regulator reflect these ministerial interests because its essential remit is:

- (a) to further the interests of citizens in relation to communication matters; and
- (b) to further the interests of consumers in relevant markets, where appropriate by promoting competition (Communications Act, 2003: Section 3).

The first problem this encounters is it that confuses audiences with consumers which constitutes a fundamental misreading of broadcasting economics. While the above passage refers to viewers in their dual capacities, it ascribes to them the label of consumers. In doing so, it mistakes what is being sold and who is doing the buying. Moreover, such a stance fails to acknowledge the pivotal role of the advertising industry in determining television programming because it espouses a false market relationship. Commercial television, as Seymour-Ure (1996:139) points out, is funded by advertising and hence audiences have to be fitted in with the needs of advertisers. For this reason the audience is the commodity in the sense that they are being traded (rather than the programme itself) and therefore it is the advertisers who are the consumers, rather than viewers⁵. In this way it has often been the needs of advertising that have dictated scheduling rather than the direct interaction of viewer choices with broadcasters. This is a serious weakness because the operations of the industry have not been accurately understood given that viewer power has been misconceived.

⁵ I am thankful to Professor Justin Lewis for this point.

The new regulator's purpose is to oversee the media industry and manage it in such a way that these dual aims are continuously met. OFCOM's Chairman, David Currie (2003), states that the main intention is to operate with a 'light touch' to promote competition wherever possible because this ensures the most efficient use of the electromagnetic spectrum. It is the belief in the free market that delineates OFCOM's role, setting out its main duties as the prevention of anti-competitive behaviour by facilitating enterprise to bolster the prosperity of the nation and further the interests of consumers. OFCOM will apply the 1998 Competition Act and 2002 Enterprise Act in these matters and has concurrent powers with the Office of Fair Trading to guarantee a fair and thriving market in regards to networks and services (CA, 2003:369). The new regulator has been invested with powers to curb instances of anti-competitive behaviour that arise through the abuse of market position to ensure consumers have a wide range of choices at the lowest possible prices.

The deregulatory spirit of the legislation enacted by the Labour Government can be captured by some of the rulings it has implemented. The need to develop a dynamic industry has had a huge impact in the area of ownership, with the purpose of simplifying the whole system through removing restrictions to attract investment from non-traditional sources and to foster a network of advantageous connections across the media industry. This is not consistent with the above measures because it has created scope for anti-competitive behaviour by removing restrictions and enabling takeovers to occur where previously they were prohibited. A major ruling is to allow the single ownership of ITV by permitting its two largest companies, Granada and Carlton, to merge (CA, 2003:351). The proposed deal had to gain approval under the competition clauses that relate to the detrimental effects it might have in terms of the overall level of competition. This merger has since happened, to enable what former BBC Director-General Greg Dyke called another 800 lb gorilla to take root (in Jowell, 2003). The resulting entity displays the underlying sense of the Government's policy neatly in that a vastly bigger company has been created to trade more effectively in the international jungle of media markets. Whether this will result in a movement away from ITV's traditional regional commitments remains to be seen, although it is nevertheless a serious worry, as is the likelihood that dominant domestic positions will be embellished.

The disqualification on ownership of non-EU companies from broadcasting licences has now been lifted and is a further such competitive measure contained within the Act (CA, 2003:348). It is now possible for any individual or firm from anywhere in the world to buy into the commercial television stations. The significance of this is pointed out by O'Carroll (2003), as it sanctions companies the size of US media giants AOL Time Warner or Viacom to take control of ITV. This ruling could signal a wave of international takeovers within the television industry as it is intended to benefit British broadcasting from the substantial investment of foreign owners. Tunstall (2004:263) regards this as a continuation of a general trend in recent years of loosening regulation to allow the big to get bigger. The downside to this is that it could result in the channel being driven away from the interests of its viewers to operate solely in terms of profit considerations and espouse the interests of the owners in its coverage of issues that arise. The export led discourse outlined earlier is not well served by these measures because it is highly likely that the nation will import more programming as foreign owners take charge. This highlights the major quandary in relaxing ownership rules, as the benefits of creating bigger firms that can compete in the international market has to be balanced against the possible threat such players present to the accuracy and diversity of viewpoints across the whole system, along with the danger that domestic firms will be squeezed out by larger TNC's.

These tensions surfaced most acutely in the formation of rules concerning cross-media ownership. The Government had intended to lift takeover restrictions for the same reasons of enabling Channel Five to gain from the financial leverage of being part of a large company. This however, formed a major bone of contention with a section of the House of Lords led by David Puttnam opposed to such a ruling (O'Carroll, 2003). The rebel group identified a problem in that cross-ownership could be exploited by those with a prominent place in the national newspaper market, such as Rupert Murdoch, to reduce the total number of voices and therefore wanted to block the ruling. In the end a compromise was reached with the introduction of a new plurality test to protect the public interest in big mergers, designed to ensure no single owner can have a dominant share of voice across the whole industry (Gibson, 2003). The amendment states that if any newspaper owner with more than 20% market share of the national newspaper market bids for Channel Five, the proposal must be referred to OFCOM, which must then gauge if the move would reduce the number of views

across the whole industry. If so, the bid would be delivered to the Department of Trade and Industry, who can refer the proposed merger to the Competition Commission which has the power to block it (CA, 2003:378).

The aim is to stop the formation of bigger entities that would lead to a reduction in the number of views emanating from the whole media. The test seeks to quantify the 'share of voice' that results from a deal and would be applied if:

a national newspaper with more than 20% of the market tries to buy Channel Five; when a national newspaper group attempts the takeover of a national radio station; when any company makes a bid for ITV; if ITV or Channel Five takes over a national radio station or when two national radio stations attempt to merge (Gibson, 2003).

The presence of the plurality test indicates how the relaxation of such rules has been qualified. Crucially, this means cross-media mergers can be stopped on cultural grounds rather than on the economic basis as already covered by the competition rulings because it applies the notion of plurality to gauge the public interest. As the Communications Act (2003:375) accepts that there is a need for sufficient plurality of voices, it suggests the Government is aware of the potential damage that economic imperatives could impose upon cultural output. The main theme of consolidation that runs through the Communications Act is therefore to be subject to a caveat in recognition that corporate aims may run counter to the public interest. However, there can be no doubt though that this legislation is still extremely favourable to big business as it allows corporations to spread their activities into other media sectors and allows single markets to consolidate around fewer firms.

While OFCOM has to carry out regular reviews of media ownership to assess the impact of these measures on the shape of the industry (CA, 2003:391), its duties do not revolve solely around this issue. Content also has a prime place within OFCOM's charter as the Communications Act spells out how programming remains a major concern. Output is to be subjected to the "application of standards that promote adequate protection to members of the public from the inclusion of offensive and harmful material" (CA, 2003:3). OFCOM has thus inherited the responsibilities of the legacy content regulators in that it covers matters related to taste and decency. This

clause also pertains to fairness in the treatment of all individuals in programming and privacy, so that there will still be extensive checks on the media's behaviour, and the power to impose financial penalties on those who transgress.

Furthermore, the regulatory system also directs the broadcasters towards certain social goals through the demands it makes of them. The Government is keen to stress public service broadcasting has a firm place within the digital future, and that it wants to maintain and strengthen it (CA, 2003:264). The Culture Secretary, Jowell (2003), expresses that public service is a vital part of the broadcasting architecture because of the creativity and innovation it adds. Thus, the Communications Act has laid down elements of what it should deliver, including peak time news and current affairs, quality programming, balance, educational matters and regionally and culturally diverse programming in a wide range of genres (CA, 2003:264). All public service channels must have 25% of their total programming commissioned from independent producers, as well as an appropriate proportion of original productions in their schedules, the latter of which should be broadcast in an appropriate manner between peak time viewing and other times (CA, 2003:277-279).

These demands are more in tune with the cultural imperatives that have historically defined the scope of public service broadcasting and illuminates how the Government plans its retention because of the non-financial benefits it delivers. Indeed, Jowell (2003) advances that public service broadcasting adds diversity and accuracy to the schedule, and caters for regional audiences, all of which underlines its importance to the television environment. Browne (2003:2) sees this recognition as an acknowledgement of the special importance of the media, something which modifies the Government's general economic approach towards the communications sector. This reasoning is perhaps indicative of an acceptance that markets do not always deliver and that some form of guidance and intervention is necessary to guarantee audiences a sufficient type and range of output, as well as ensuring that some of it occupies prime time. Such measures contradict the general drive towards a free market because they stifle broadcaster's activities. The legal framework is therefore not consistent because it tries to cover too many irreconcilable interests and espouses contradictory objectives.

While the theme of public service has featured prominently in Governmental discourses, it has been accompanied by the need to conceptualise the basic elements encompassing the role and purpose with greater clarity. One of OFCOM's first tasks has been to initiate a review of public service broadcasting to answer these questions in time for the BBC's Charter renewal in 2006 (CA, 2003:264). This is the first of a regular series and has been conceived to give a concrete definition to public service to enable all broadcasters with these obligations to move with changing times and fit in with a new era (Jowell, 2003). The scheme's significance is highlighted by the regulator's Chief Executive Officer, Stephen Carter, when he points out that it will be an independent report, rather than one conducted by the Government or BBC, and that OFCOM's holistic approach will culminate in a first ever written constitution for public service television in the UK, outlining what it is expected to deliver and the means with which to do it (quoted in Deans, 2003).

OFCOM's report (2005a:4) has attempted to conceptualise the purposes and characteristics of such a philosophy as the regulator feels that it should be maintained and strengthened for the future media landscape. Significantly, the recommendations stress that there should be a competitive market for public service broadcasting with a plurality of suppliers to ensure a plethora of funding mechanisms and different institutional models so that it is not confined within a single source or organization (OFCOM, 2005b). Such measures are designed to ensure public service will function across several distribution outlets to remain a doctrine central to media practise in the new technological conditions. To facilitate this importance, OFCOM (2005a:15) has proposed the establishment of a Public Service Publisher to achieve the desired plurality in provision because it is hoped such measures would enable public service to be spread across the various distribution channels that are emerging. So, while there are issues over the exact shape and funding of public service broadcasting, OFCOM (2005b) is committed to developing these ideas further to give it a new role and definition. Thus, it seems likely from the rhetoric emanating out of Government and OFCOM that the BBC, and more generally public service broadcasting, will have an important role to play in British television, despite (or perhaps because of) the general trend to deregulate. While there are a number of issues to iron out concerning the fundamental tenets of this philosophy, there appears to be a sense that such debates are intended to sharpen its overall focus in new circumstances. Whether public service

broadcasting can meaningfully exist in an environment rooted in commercialism though remains to be seen.

The set of objectives the Government has, and the measures it has adopted, are indicative of an all encompassing political approach to the communications sector, where policy is being directed by a dual purpose that has meant balancing between the various priorities in order to serve individuals and the nation optimally. A revealing aspect of OFCOM is the manner in which its literature continually refers to the 'citizen-consumer' in the discussion of communications. For Browne (2003:2), this term is central to its future operation because it shows that the new regulator is sensitive to the different interests individuals have in their capacity as either. Such an angle though does misread the economics of broadcasting because it incorrectly conceives the relationship between viewers and broadcasters. Moreover, the stance embellishes how there is a cultural need for the system of control to back up the general deregulatory trend in relation to structural issues in order to retain certain content thresholds. The OFCOM Fact sheet (2003) lists the approach being adopted when stating how the regulator is committed to protecting the interests of consumers in terms of choice, price, quality of service and value for money, whilst also maintaining the high quality of content, a wide range of programming, and plurality of public expression. By doing so, it is hoped that British television will establish itself at the forefront of the emerging global market whilst preserving its historically established cultural nucleus.

OFCOM's remit is most aptly summed up by its Chief Executive Officer when insisting "we are fundamentally free market and light touch, tempered by a bit of social justice" (Carter, 2004). This recognises that while the free market is a mechanism necessary for the furtherance of economic aims, its operations do not always safeguard cultural needs. Such an understanding reinforces the case for a robust regulatory system that serves the public interest, and the creation of a single authority to handle content and competition issues is a deliberate attempt to successfully manage the tensions that arise. OFCOM has a difficult task then in trying to secure what have sometimes been contradictory objectives because they both feature as prominent concerns in the legislative regime. The 'joined up' design of the regulator is an attempt to reconcile the double dilemma Golding (1998b:10) explains

Government's have had in trying to balance the media's peculiar standing as cultural institutions, with the economic contributions it makes to the nation's fabric. Whether OFCOM can achieve this depends very much on its ability to insulate public service broadcasting from the marching commercial pressures that are beginning to characterise the wider television environment.

Switchover

While the advantages and purpose of digital media are apparent, the fact remains that there is currently a dual system, as the old transmission mode of analogue is still in operation to cater for those who have not yet converted. It has become an increasingly imperative aspect of Government thinking that the analogue frequencies have to be switched off to in order to usher in a complete digital communications system. The reasoning is outlined by OFCOM:

Digital switchover has the potential to transform TV broadcasting, not least to create a more effective and well-functioning broadcasting market; it could open up new avenues for the creative talents of the broadcasting industry; and it would provide the scope for new and exciting opportunities in broadcasting and in new communications technologies by freeing up a large amount of potentially valuable spectrum. The benefits are widely spread, however with some accruing to consumers, some accruing to Government and some to broadcasting companies (OFCOM, 2004a: section 1.4).

This extract shows that the need to go digital applies across several interest groups in what has been conceived as an 'all win' situation because of the advantages it engenders. Indeed, the Broadcasting Minister, Lord McIntosh, has the responsibility of persuading the entire UK population to switch to digital and he feels it will create a "wired society for everyone" (quoted in Snoddy, 2004:45).

The particular advantages of having the entire communications sphere configured digitally relate to how it enables a more efficient use of the available spectrum. The Government has an incentive to reclaim the frequencies for other uses, given that digital transmissions occupy far less space (BBC, 2004a:4), enabling the development of new services and more programming options to give audiences a greater degree of choice. Switchover is being pursued then because it enables the

formation of a free market and coheres with plans to create a vibrant broadcasting industry characterised by many suppliers in full competition, even though the BBC will have a role within this digital future.

Furthermore, Murdock (2000b:44) observes how the British Government auctioned off licences for sections of the radio spectrum capable of supporting third generation mobile telephone services in 2000, raising £22.5 billion for the Treasury. It is envisaged that selling off the spare broadcasting spectrum space after analogue switch off could raise a comparable amount. Also, Thomas (1999:72) points out that broadcasters are extremely keen to end the expensive simulcasting period. Currently, they must transmit their programming in both analogue and digital formats, something which is far more costly than doing it in either one. Madry (2004) stresses that research confirms switchover will bring the nation billions of pounds worth of benefits through making more efficient use of the spectrum. Thus, switchover is a firm policy objective because it is thought to generate a short-term financial windfall and a series of long-term gains in terms of economic conditions, broadcasting efficiency and audience choice.

The question is how to get to a situation where this can be sanctioned. Switching to a complete mode of digital transmissions should only occur when everyone has migrated from analogue, otherwise the risk of depriving people of their television service and potentially, disenfranchising them, is severe. Since 1999, the Government has said it plans to switch off the analogue frequencies sometime between 2006-10 (Snoddy, 2004:45). As a check to this, the Government's Digital Television Action Plan has set a number of stipulations for when it can take place:

- Everyone who can currently get the main public service broadcasting channels in analogue form (BBC 1 and 2, ITV, Channel 4/S4C and Channel 5) can receive them digitally;
- Switching to digital is an affordable option for the vast majority of people;
- As a target indicator of affordability, 95% of consumers have access to digital equipment (DAP, 2001).

The first test refers to the coverage of digital broadcasts and ensures they must be available to everyone, so that moving away from analogue will not disadvantage those who had the minimum service it offered. The second condition addresses access

and exhibits sensitivity to the expense involved in changing hardware. Lastly, switchover can only occur when digital television is an affordable option for viewers and when nearly all of them have adopted it. These three tests are interlocked with each other as availability can be achieved by means of any of the three platforms (terrestrial, cable and satellite) and taken together, the coverage of these platforms is very close to the 99.4% penetration provided by analogue terrestrial broadcasting (BBC/ITC, 2003:4). The conditions have been designed in such a way that switchover can only occur after a widespread diffusion of digital television has been achieved to the extent that it forms a near total migration.

As penetration is a major criterion for switching off the analogue frequencies, the rate of consumer take-up is vitally important in allowing the Government to proceed with its plans. There are however a number of serious obstacles to overcome in this market centred approach to adoption. OFCOM's (2004a:1.9) research indicates that the digital television market will reach 78% of households by the end of 2010. Perhaps more problematic is the likelihood that some viewers will not want digital television at any point, regardless of the benefits it can bring, possibly because they may not have a need for them. Collins (2002a:8) draws from research that shows there is a hard core element amongst the audience who claim they will never switch to digital television. Additionally, the BBC's (2004a:6) research indicates that about six million viewers are resistant to digital television who see no reason to adopt it, finding it too confusing and/or difficult to use. This raises a crucial political question in that it is not clear how these people can be converted and what to do with them if they flatly refuse. The Government may choose to subsidise these viewers or they could simply proceed and switch off analogue transmissions at the target date. Whichever course of action is taken, it is certain that some will feel aggrieved at either paying for a product others have had assistance with, or else at completely losing their analogue service.

Moreover, the OFCOM official I interviewed, Peter Madry (2004), reinforced the feeling that not all the plans were entirely clear by explaining that it is not possible to achieve 95% penetration of digital television until the analogue signal is actually switched off. He pointed out that dual transmissions would make it possible for only 75% of the country to get digital services and that is as far as it can go while both systems are in operation. Analogue would have to be switched off at this level in

order to enable more viewers to receive digital services. This technical issue relates to the state of the consumer market, but the manner in which it is resolved is ultimately a question of public policy. Its importance means the switch off process would need to be started before the market has reached the stipulated levels of migration detailed within the Digital Action Plan.

Another matter to settle concerns the households who have more than one television and/or video recorders. The criteria for switchover focus solely on the conversion of the primary set, not all of the additional hardware a household might have (BBC/ITC, 2003:30). The widespread dispersion of video recorders, aligned to the tendency for many homes to have at least one other television is a challenge, as such equipment will become obsolete when analogue is discontinued. OFCOM's research (2004a:6.12) projects that only 17% of secondary sets will have been converted to digital by 2010. Whether these households, who have a digital television as their main set, will receive support or be expected to upgrade their other equipment has not yet been decided. This is a potential problem in regards to switchover, but it is compounded further by the fact that analogue television sets and unconverted video recorders are still being sold in retail outlets, despite the push to go digital. Allowing analogue hardware to be sold when the plans are for it to be no longer operational suggests it is some way from being phased out, particularly as the date has been put back a few times already.

OFCOM is informally engaged in switchover because the main aim coheres with the regulator's objective of effective spectrum management (Carter, 2004). Although this is an indirect involvement in the actual processes, it has taken a firm interest in the broad project. OFCOM (2004a:7.41-7.44) recommends the establishment of a definite timetable and single body, *SwitchCO*, to be endowed with overall responsibility for switchover, which should highlight the benefits to consumers, market its practicalities, provide support to consumers, co-ordinate overall progress and liaise with all interested parties. These suggestions have been formulated to ensure there is full public knowledge about the timing and reasoning for switchover, and to illuminate the particular steps involved in the transition. It is unclear at the time of writing as to what further methods the Government will employ, although it has been working closely with the television industry to ensure all those

involved are directing their efforts towards this end (DAP, 2001). Additionally, in April 2005, the authority *SwitchCO* was formed to facilitate the switchover process in the way recommended by OFCOM, to act as the supporting body and buttress the main instrument of the market.

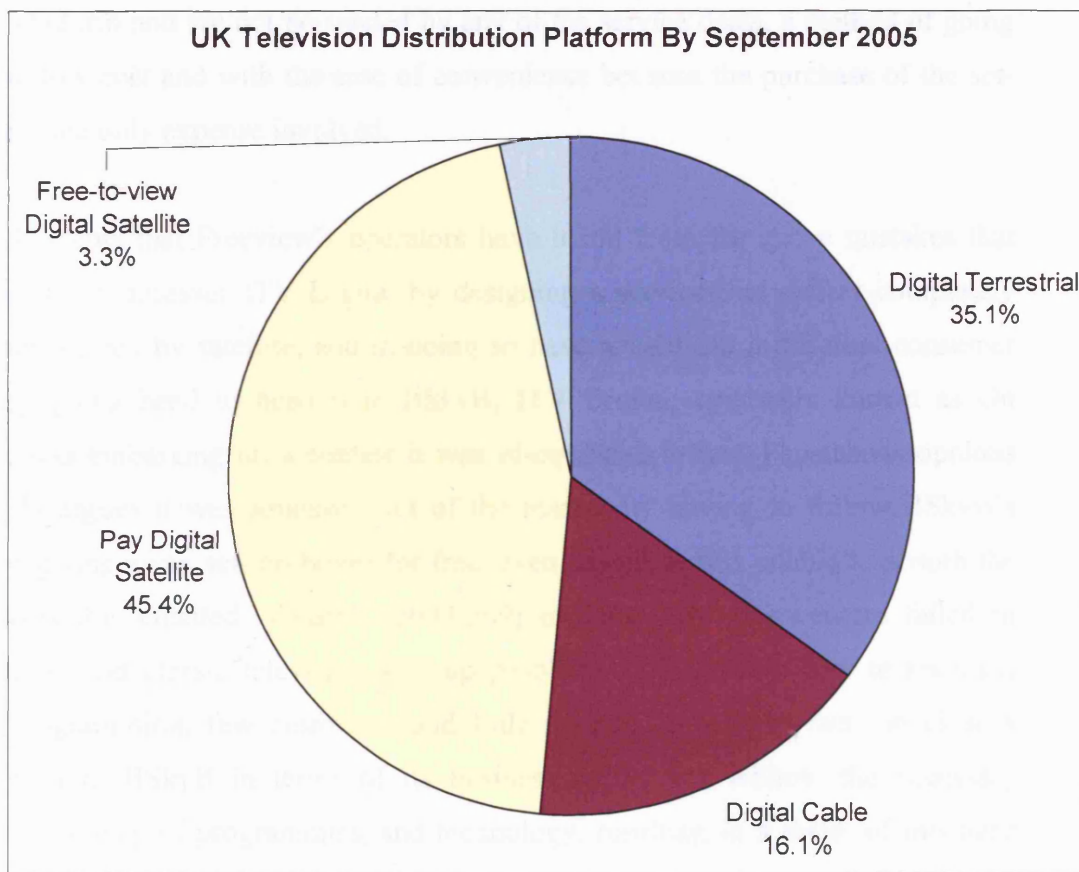
Switchover is a critical issue because it encapsulates the intricacies of how to change technologies, whereby the presumed benefits of the information society can be fully attainable. It is a question which therefore determines how we get out of this transitional stage between analogue and digital to reap the vast array of advantages that the Government envisages are associated with the latter, and it is this which explains its perennial presence in policy documentation. Madry (2004) likens it to a huge jigsaw puzzle with several different elements to piece together, the success of which depends upon the degree of co-ordination fused between all of the parties involved. There are however, serious doubts from some within Government and the industry over whether switchover is achievable, because it appears unlikely that the 95% penetration rate will be achieved by 2010 (Sourbati, 2004:587). For these reasons, some commentators doubt whether switchover will occur at all (Curran and Seaton, 2003:279). However, given the political importance of digitalisation and its centrality towards the Government's overall plans, it seems certain that switchover will have to take place because of the hopes invested in a digital system of communication. In other words, the general economic and civic plans this Government espouses are totally dependent on switchover. Whether it will be achieved by the target date and with all of the delicate issues resolved remains to be seen. What is certain is that it will surely become a major political theme in the foreseeable future as the Government attempts to negotiate all of the serious concerns connected to this firm policy commitment.

Take-up

Figure 6.1 on the following page is based on the latest OFCOM (2005c:2) research. It shows how effectively digital television has progressed and the relative audience share of the rival operators at the end of September, 2005. Firstly, the data reveal that digital is now the major system of television distribution because 65.9% of

the UK population (16.5 million homes) has acquired it on one of the platforms, which added together far exceeds the amount garnered by standard terrestrial analogue. This shows a steady and incremental rise over the last year (OFCOM, 2004:33), to illuminate the joint success of the major platforms since the launch. Such a high rate of take-up resonates with the Government's joy at the continuing diffusion of digital television, which they feel proves that the early embracement and promotion was well placed (Jowell, 2003).

Figure 6.1: The Take-up of Digital Television



Source: OFCOM (2005c:6)

Regarding audience share, figure 6.1 illuminates how successful Freeview has been and that it has stimulated the diffusion of digital television in recent years. With

5.8 million households and a steady rate of increase recently (OFCOM, 2005c:2), the terrestrial platform amounts to just over a third of the total digital market. So, during the course of the three years since its launch in October 2002, this venture has propelled the BBC into the information age as a platform operator, diffused the technology to a widespread audience and recovered some confidence in the whole project that had been shaken by the collapse of ITV Digital. Freeview offers a different type of digital service as compared to the others, utilising its attraction as a one-off payment with no contract to work as a service that is free at the point of use. The BBC's research (2004b:23) confirms that the appeal of this terrestrial package lies in the manner in which it offers those viewers who do not like the idea of Pay-TV on any platform and are not persuaded by any of the service deals, a method of going digital at low cost and with the ease of convenience because the purchase of the set-top box is the only expense involved.

It seems that Freeview's operators have learnt from the grave mistakes that troubled its predecessor ITV Digital by designing a service that differs completely from that offered by satellite, and in doing so have sought out a different consumer base. By going head to head with BSkyB, ITV Digital, originally known as On Digital, was embarking on a contest it was ill-equipped to last. Papathanassopolous (2002:51) argues it was squeezed out of the market by having to follow BSkyB's tactic of giving away set-top boxes for free, even though it was unable to absorb the huge costs this entailed. Tunstall (2004:269) explains how this venture failed to navigate around classic television start-up problems of unreliable new technology, costly programming, few customers and little revenue. It was in fact too close a proposition to BSkyB in terms of its business model but without the necessary attributes by way of programming and technology, resulting in a series of mis-haps from day one and an alarmingly high churn-rate. Curran and Seaton (2003:278) detail how this terrestrial project was bedevilled by managerial incompetence, typified by the decision to pay £315 million for the rights to minor league football. ITV Digital collapsed in May 2002, incurring an estimated £1.2 billion loss in the process and left serious doubts over how to operate a digital platform (*ibid.*). However, it is clear that Freeview is a package formulated on the grounds of cost-effectiveness and convenience to reach resistant consumers through the one-off payment, a strategy that is proving successful in the drive to achieve switchover.

ITV's problems are compounded further by the recent revelation that subscription based revenue has exceeded advertising for the first time in 2003. OFCOM's annual report (2004b:4.22) shows that subscription is now the largest single source of finance for the television industry, as it rose by 11% to reach £3295 million in 2003, while advertising revenue rose 3% to £3240 million. OFCOM feels this could signal a structural change within the industry in terms of the way programmes are funded and an overall shift in the balance of power within the television market towards direct consumer spending (ibid.). While such figures illuminate the character and depth of contemporary change, they simultaneously hold severe consequences for ITV. Without a subscription based revenue stream because it is no longer a platform operator, and saddled with debts from its failed venture, the company will struggle to raise finance for new operations from a smaller advertising cake that has to be shared between more channels.

The data also show that BSkyB is the overall leader in the UK digital television market, with 45.5% of the market, equating to 7.5 million subscribers (OFCOM, 2005c:3). Satellite is therefore the platform of choice for most digital viewers, with about 400 channels, some of which offer the premium content audiences are willing to pay extra for. The BBC's (2004b:23) research finds that the appeal lies in its number of channels and its ability to offer exclusive content, particularly at those times when they are available at specially discounted prices. This highlights the business acumen and marketing strengths that have typified BSkyB's approach and explains the success it has had. However, its rate of up-take has slowed recently, with only a 0.6% increase over the previous year, and is far behind that of Freeview, which enjoyed an 11.5% rise over the same period (OFCOM, 2005c:4).

The predictions of many analysts that digital television would be Rupert Murdoch's field seem to be backed up by the way the market has developed. Griffiths (2003:185) feels the company has succeeded because of its understanding of the business models required and by modifying its actions in the light of the demands made by a digital television market. It has done this by securing the sort of prime content, chiefly sport, that audiences want, together with a clever marketing strategy, an array of service deals designed to appeal to different customers and a sophisticated

technology that works effectively. Griffiths (2004) argues the company exudes an astute grasp of the technological issues and is using this mastery to gain a competitive advantage. In sum, Murdoch has deployed a successful business strategy that has moulded together content, technology and marketing to extract revenues directly out of viewers, enabling the firm to garner a sizeable customer base. However, its near virtual command of the digital market in the early years after launch has slipped because of the success of Freeview.

The figures confirm that cable is struggling in this business arena, having already been quickly overtaken by Freeview, and with only 2.6 million subscribers (OFCOM, 2005c:3). Its market share has remained relatively low (16.1%), even though it has been involved with this technology almost since its launch. Research (BBC, 2004b:17) states that the cable companies have suffered from a funding crisis and that their number of subscribers have remained steady for several years. The digital cable platform launched late as compared to the others in the summer of 1999, and its main companies, NTL and Telewest, are failing to make any profit from their services, forcing them to cut back their investment plans (Curran and Seaton, 2003:277). Without deep pockets or their own programming and a fairly static consumer base, the cable operators will need a fresh injection of cash and ideas if they are to prosper. Finally, the current digital audience is also comprised of 545,000 free-to-view satellite homes (3.3%), and 38,000 subscribers to television over ADSL, which amounts to 0.22% share of the digital television market (OFCOM, 2005c:6).

Overall, these figures reveal that digital television is penetrating the UK audience and that it is largely progressing along the two platforms of satellite and terrestrial because of their appeal to different kinds of viewers⁶. It also suggests the biggest players are the BBC and BSkyB because both have a considerable presence as platform operators to augment their status as channel providers. Papathanassopolous (2002:51) argues the diffusion of any technology will follow the imperatives of the industry, not of the technology itself in the need to sell new products. Therefore, it seems that digital television is shaping up around these two protagonists, who despite

⁶ I am unable to penetrate the issue of business history and industry shape as much as it deserves owing to constraints of space and the fluidity of change within this sector, but recommend Griffiths (2003) as a good outline of the major issues involved in the business strategies of digital television.

being very different, have successfully negotiated the demands the new circumstances have placed upon them by securing control over content and distribution, both of which are helping to shift the product of digital television. The distinctly public and private status of each of these means digital television in Britain is anchored on very different ideological ground as it progresses.

Overview

This chapter has provided a commentary on the broad Governmental approach towards the restructuring of the communications environment and how such plans have given a definite shape to the development of digital television. It is the belief in the power of digital technology and its perceived social impact that has set out the political stance, resonating with McQuail's (1998:224) observation that a new era of media policy is opening up, for which the concept of the information society provides a central, organising pillar. The sentiment that digitalisation imposes widespread change has called for Government to act in a certain way, and in doing so, exhibits a high degree of technological determinism for the manner in which the relationship with society has been conceived. Owing to the feeling that digital communications transform various aspects of social life, the Government sees its own role as unobtrusive, working to ensure the free market operates yet to also secure universal access to the services disseminated, reflective of its pro-activity in implementing the transition. Moreover, the definitional importance the media has acquired to the new circumstances explains the amount of time and energy the Government has devoted to it, as a raft of policy material has attempted to harness the promise fully in regards to fostering active citizenship and the development of its industrial potential.

Digital television is therefore part of a wider project and it forms a critical node within the fabric of what is hoped to be a technologically rich social system. The medium has a vital role in terms of the business and civic contributions it can make to the extent that it has become an organising instrument for the general plans of creating an information society. There is no surprise in observing that the free market is again seen as the optimal method for organisation, as industrial objectives mark out the medium's overall purpose and delineate its structural arrangements at the same time

as efforts are being made to utilise its civic worth. It is this need for change which understates Governmental plans to reconfigure the media's regulatory apparatus and make certain demands of digital television, because old arrangements have been considered as inappropriate for current technological conditions and the new priorities that accompany them. However, the emphasis on corporate enlargement and deregulation is qualified by certain controls and a rhetorical desire to maintain public service. Such plans reveal the intention of covering conflicting interests to suggest the complete realization of all objectives is unrealistic.

The new television has to steer clear of some outcomes associated with liberalisation whilst championing others because of the foundations upon which it has been based. This approach is ideologically inconsistent because its general thrust is deregulatory and in favour of the market, yet advances certain controls that exhibit a fear of some types of content and a need for others. Importantly, the enterprise basis of legislation is compromised by the manner in which some rulings have been formulated to advance the needs of big businesses. It seems the broadcasting model being constructed most closely approximates the social market approach Curran and Seaton (1991:340) outline, where the general principles of competition are adopted for the organisation of the communication system, although some grounds for public intervention are established, which are justified in reference to the wider political or cultural role of the media in society.

The Government's digital television policy therefore intends to steer broadcasters towards the realization of certain goals because of the framework it has situated them within at the same time as encouraging freedom and enterprise. While this structure imposes particular requirements on broadcasters, the danger is that these could be squeezed out in time because of the predominance of commercial forces. Indeed, the Government has repeatedly insisted it wants a competitive television industry and has deregulated to that end, while OFCOM declares itself to be 'light touch'. Thus, I agree with Wheeler (2001:34) in that while information has been adjudged to be of simultaneous use for both citizen and consumer need, the Government's approach signifies the pursuit of industrial over social goals for public inclusion. The communications framework displays a structural orientation towards economic objectives that may in time impinge on its ability to fulfil the social aims

also ascribed to it because it is these financial needs that form its overall thrust. This interplay between old and new issues encapsulates the desire to advance economic objectives whilst safeguarding cultural values has set the Government a difficult task in its digital television policy given that the framework is ideologically contradictory.

Further pressure is applied when considering how the political plans are totally dependent on consumer take-up. If audiences do not want digital television, the Government's timetable for switchover and by extension, its aims for a thriving broadcasting market and new era of active citizenship are thrown into severe doubt, particularly as State policy cannot legislate for consumer choice in a market based approach. While the take-up of digital television has hitherto progressed quite well, evidence suggests it could soon reach a saturation point that is well below that needed to fulfil Government aims. These resistors are surely going to form an increasingly problematic source in regards to realising the plans of creating an information society. It is also clear that the Government has framed digital television as a panacea because of its applicability to various areas of social policy. The economy, health, education and governance are all heavily dependent on the new communications system in terms of policy as the Government is seeking a technological solution to all of these issues, a strategy that is reflective of the determinism it has attributed to the innovations. This stance takes responsibility for these matters away from Government and unfairly places it on digital television. So, while there is an immense degree of political hope invested within the new medium, there remain a number of intricate issues that must be continually negotiated if these objectives are to be realised, and it is these priorities that should replace the general belief that digital television will autonomously impact on society in a multiplicity of beneficial ways.

Chapter 7: Content - Old Wine In New Bottles?

Until this point, this thesis has documented a panoply of ideas concerning the key variable of programming and its potential shifts in relation to wider processes of change. I have outlined different viewpoints on the resultant output which develops from a multichannel system, along with Government intentions for the type of institutional structure that is being erected, a strategy that in itself is designed to lead to a thriving market characterised by a diversity in programming. This chapter aims to bring a certainty to these claims by examining closely the reality of the current television system, highlighting its defining contours via the relative composition of the content it transmits. The focus is on breaking down the offerings through genre because this entails observing shifts in the provision of various types of programme. My intention is, as Franklin (2001:91) explains in his discussion, to investigate how particular genres have fared in the new broadcasting ecology. In other words, the proportionate allocation of certain genres will indicate the extent to which the television systems examined are committed to entertainment or factual programming, how this differs amongst the channels themselves and whether this signals a systemic change over time¹.

Through investigating the programming patterns of the current terrestrial and digital channels a conceptual map of the sorts of content available should emerge, one which highlights distinctive elements of the broadcasting landscape. It will be possible to distinguish between the channel's output and make sense of how they differ by accounting for why this is so (Legatt, 1996:85). In comparing the content patterns with those from the pre-digital era the analysis will proceed to dissect three

¹ I am indebted to Professor Justin Lewis for this and many other ideas that underpin this chapter.

television systems to verify how the medium is constituted at different times, alongside the impact of multiple channels in regards to the overall service.

A thorough comparative study of the television schedules of the terrestrial systems of 1984 and 2004, along with that of a selection of digital channels from 2004 will reveal how the medium has developed and the particular contribution multichannel television has made. Such a focus makes it possible to unravel what Burton (2000:33) calls the implications of categorizing. That is, by observing the composition of the schedules via the constituent groupings of programmes, it will be possible to uncover any new formats that have emerged, the distribution of genres amongst individual channels, and the overall make-up of each system. The findings should thus illuminate the decisions broadcasters have made by stressing the priorities they have given to certain types of programming.

The objective is to construct a typology of different broadcasting systems, similar to that which Raymond Williams devised in his classic study that quantified internal and systemic patterns within broadcasting in the early 1970's. Williams (1990:84) pinpointed a polarisation between British public and commercial channels, whereby the former exhibited a much greater commitment to the genres of news, documentaries, education, arts and music, children's programmes and plays, than the latter, which was concentrated towards drama series and serials, movies and general entertainment. This contrast was accentuated further in the American channels Williams examined and he was able to advance explanations for the divisions. Any study of this kind therefore reveals an institutional character as the programming data is reflective of the broadcasting structure that creates it by identifying the types of output different models of broadcasting are inclined to produce. The assumption is that channels will be steered towards a particular set of genres because of the institutional context they are situated within and the related pressures upon them.

The figures such an analysis generates should be able confirm which of the claims made earlier in this project are most valid and clarify the theoretical position which most aptly describes the reality of digital television by quantifying significant elements of change. The concerns which anchor this study are summed up below:

One of the crucial questions here is whether the numerous new TV channels...have resulted in a change in the ratio of light, entertainment programming, compared to 'serious' informational genres; in a marginalization of less popular and informational programming (outside primetime); in an increase of the total amount of imported TV programmes (especially from the United States) because of the increase of TV hours to be filled; and in a growing convergence of public and private TV channels in style and ethos as well as in content, as different channels compete for the same household audiences at favourable peak viewing times (Brants and De Bens, 2000:18).

The passage stresses the indicators that lie at the heart of a genre based study by focusing on the array of issues that demand critical attention. These range from the balance between serious and entertainment programming, the timing of different genres within the schedule and the amount of imports, to which I am also adding repeats. For Hujanen (2000:68) it is how these coalesce to form the relative mix and proportion of the schedules that is important in the sense that it should ascertain whether certain types of programmes dominate and if there is a genuinely varied overall blend. The chapter will also seek to calculate any divisions between public and private channels by highlighting the combinations of programming that defines them within the different years.

In addition to analysing the relative amount of genres this study also compares the ratios of imports and repeats that make up each channel and system. Such data will provide a clear indication of whether programme production has altered in any significant manner by detailing the proportionate rates of content that each channel is inclined to reshow and buy in. This is important because it will illuminate the extent to which channel proliferation has led to an increased dependency on these types of programmes by revealing how airtime has been divided up, as well as confirming if this has changed in the period under investigation.

Any focus on television output often runs into the quality debate because judgements about the standard of broadcasting service are inevitably set against some sort of criterion against which the medium's performance can be gauged. As Corner (1995:162) explains, since the 1950's there has been a long standing concern with quality in television, and more generally, the effect of its content on literacy and learning. That is, critics have expressed the fear that television output negatively

affects people's understanding of critical issues. Moreover, a recent strand to this asks whether television standards have declined through 'dumbing down' as compared to previous periods in its history in the sense that programmes are now worse.

While the quality issue has occupied a central plank within broadcasting debates since the medium's inception, the concept itself has not been adequately defined, leaving the matter unresolved. The problem has always been that what people classify as good is always open to argument (Dahlgren, 2000b:26). There is indeed a great deal of contention on how to achieve quality in television with numerous thresholds applied by various people, while others doubt the existence of such a notion altogether². Rather than address this complex matter, my concern is with the actual *composition* of the schedules and whether these differ between channels and systems. While it is possible to interpret the findings in quality terms, my intention is to illuminate the distribution of genres between different channels and systems. Thus, the purposes of this chapter are best summed up by Legatt (1996:82) as a preoccupation with range, diversity and variety, instead of a concern with quality per se, an approach that often scrutinises the cultural form embedded within a programme or its professional and technical accomplishment. Rather, the focus is on *proportion* to uncover the relative ratio of different types of programmes in order to detect the organisational arrangements in operation.

The Comparison of 1984 and 2004

Contrasting the programming patterns of a pre-multichannel television environment with a system characterised by an uncountable number of channels will make it far easier to detect where change has occurred and the fundamental character of any ensuing shifts. It should make apparent what Ellis (2002:130) calls the 'economy' of genres each television system is constituted by, before advancing reasons for why this is so. Consequently, the data should provide a means with which to evaluate digital television because setting it against a previous benchmark will emphasise how the ratio of programming has evolved in new circumstances. The question at the nucleus of this comparative study therefore is to unravel what happens

² The various approaches to quality are surveyed in Corner (1999:105).

to programming in the competitive conditions that permeate the current television system as measured against the regulated framework of the pre-digital era. The following table provides an early indication of change by illustrating the degree to which television has enlarged its aggregate hours of transmission.

Table 7.1: Total Terrestrial Broadcasting Airtime

	1984	2004
BBC 1	496 hours and 55 minutes	720 hours
BBC 2	447 hours and 35 minutes	720 hours
ITV	545 hours and 50 minutes	683 hours and 40 minutes
Channel 4	328 hours and 15 minutes	720 hours
Five	-	720 hours
Total	1818 hours and 35 minutes	3563 hours and 40 minutes

Source: Author's Own Research

Table 7.1 reveals an enormous increase in broadcasting airtime over the period under enquiry and provides instant evidence of the manner in which television has changed. While this study compares the output of the channels between 5pm to 12 midnight, I also calculated the overall number of broadcasting hours on the terrestrial systems to basically draw attention to the manner in which the medium's service has expanded in terms of total transmission time. The above statistics *were not* used for the analysis, but are simply an illustration of how much more terrestrial airtime there is over the course of a month. I could not do the same analysis for digital television simply because of the hundreds of channels that populate the system and the difficulty in locating listings for all of them. Suffice to say that some form of selectivity was required and I limited myself to those with the highest profiles and/or viewing figures as explained in Chapter Two.

The data convey that in 1984 most channels began their schedule at 6.00 am only because breakfast television had recently been inaugurated, and ended their

transmissions at around midnight. ITV proved to have the lengthiest service because it often extended its airtime beyond the others, particularly at weekends. As Channel 4 had only just been formed, its programming occupied less time than the rest, usually beginning in the early afternoon. Meanwhile, BBC2 did not run a continuous service, as there were many empty slots within its schedule when it provided the teletext service Ceefax. A substantial amount of both its daytime and late night broadcasts were also Open University programmes.

By 2004, all of the terrestrial channels had multiplied their airtime extensively by broadcasting round-the-clock each day. BBC1 increased its service by 223 hours 5 minutes in the month, a proportionate rise of 44.9%. The total transmission time on BBC2 meanwhile rose by 272 hours 25 minutes or 60.1% from 1984 to 2004. The only channel on which there was not a 24 hour daily broadcast service in 2004 was ironically, ITV1, which occasionally filled empty night time slots of approximately an hour with a teletext service. This still equates to a 25.3% increase from 1984, or 137 hours 50 minutes extra airtime. The largest change could be found with Channel 4, where 391 hours 45 minutes extra transmission time depicts a 119.2% growth in the 20 year period. With the additional channel Five also showing uninterrupted programmes each day, the total amount of terrestrial airtime in 2004 shows an enlargement of 1745 hours 5 minutes in the month, a relative rise of 96% from 1984.

The data illustrate the extent to which television has become a twenty-four hour medium and immediately raise the point of how this increased airtime has been filled given the pressure to supply a virtually uninterrupted schedule. Whilst there has been a significant expansion of broadcasting hours, even when confining the contrast to the terrestrial channels alone, it remains to be seen whether there has been matched by a proportionate increase across genres. The question that guides this study therefore is whether the immense quantitative enlargement in the hours of output has effectively served audiences in terms of the mix of programmes provided.

Table 7.2: Total Hours within the 5pm to 12 Midnight Sample

Channel	Total Hours
BBC1 1984	208 hours and 50 minutes
BBC2 1984	206 hours and 15 minutes
ITV 1984	210 hours
Channel 4 1984	208 hours and 40 minutes
Overall 1984	833 hours and 45 minutes
BBC1 2004	210 hours
BBC2 2004	210 hours
ITV 2004	210 hours
Channel 4 2004	210 hours
Five	210 hours
Overall Terrestrial 2004	1,050 hours
BBC3	150 hours
BBC4	150 hours
ITV2	210 hours
E4	210 hours
Sky1	210 hours
Overall Digital	930 hours

Source: Author's Own Research

Table 7.2 represents the actual data used for the analysis by totalling up the broadcast hours between 5pm and 12 midnight each day over the month across the various channels and three different systems. It is these figures which are the foundation on which the percentages are based because they represent the full amount of time from which the genres, imports and repeats were calculated. Therefore, all of the data in the remainder of the chapter, the overall tables at the end and those in Appendix C have been worked out from the data in table 7.2. So, when a chart refers to a percentage, the number represents the proportion of the specific channel's overall output within the time frame as depicted in this table.

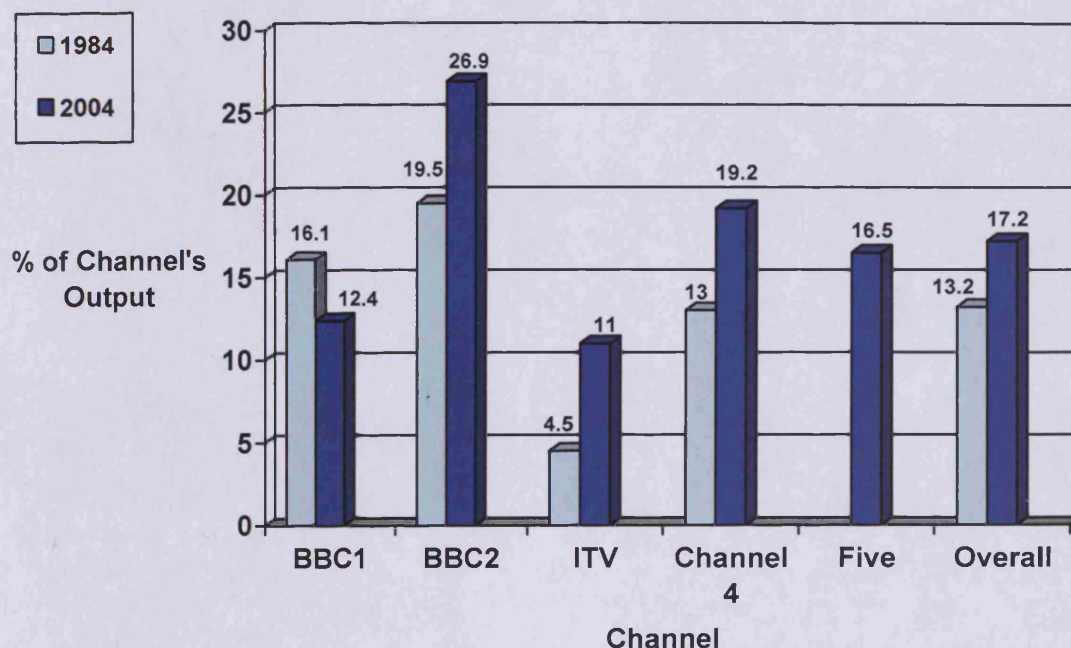
For all of the 2004 terrestrial channels, the total number of hours within the 5pm to midnight sample over the month added up to 210 hours. This was then the basis from which any particular channel's genres, imports and repeats were calculated. In terms of the overall amount for the system, I added up all the hours for the five channels to form a total amount. For the terrestrial system of 2004, this added up to 1,050 hours. This was the foundation for the overall data regarding the terrestrial system of 2004 in the chapter. The 2004 digital system required slightly more work because of the five channels selected, both BBC3 and BBC4 began their transmissions at 7pm each evening. Over the course of the month, this meant they broadcast only 150 hours within the time frame. So, it must be acknowledged that the proportion of genres, repeats and imports for these channels is derived from a lower amount of total hours. This also means that the overall number of hours for the digital system over the course of the month is smaller.

The terrestrial system of 1984 proved to be more difficult as only ITV broadcast fully from 5pm to 12 midnight on each day over the month. I therefore worked out how much time each other channel broadcast in the time frame of the analysis. In most cases, the airtime of each channel was a little less than 210 hours because they ended transmissions just before midnight. The total for each channel was therefore the figure against which that channels genres, repeats and imports were worked out. For instance, BBC 1's genres, repeats and imports were calculated by adding up how much any of these totalled and then dividing by the channel's overall airtime within the month of 208 hours and 50 minutes.

I then proceeded to add up the total for each of the channels over the month and it is this overall number in table 7.2 that represents the total amount for the terrestrial system of 1984 in the month within the 5pm to 12 midnight time frame. The total was to form the basis of the percentages for all of the overall figures in the chapter for the terrestrial system in 1984. Thus, the total amount of any specific genre, or the total amount of repeats or imports was added up and then divided by 833 hours and 45 minutes. All of the data in the chapter therefore relates to the total amounts for individual channels and overall systems as set out in table 7.2. The following section identifies the proportion of repeats and imports that make up each channel within the

time frame of the study (5pm to 12 midnight), together with their overall rates within the different broadcasting systems to illuminate whether there are notable variations in the manner in which each utilises such programmes.

Figure 7.1 - Comparison of the Terrestrial Systems: Repeats



Source: Author's Own Research

Figure 7.1 shows the differences between the proportion of repeats within the terrestrial systems of 1984 and 2004. In most cases, there has been a significant rise, with certain genres featuring prominently³. BBC1 had a total of 33 hours 35 minutes of repeats in 1984, translating as 16.1% of its entire output. This was comprised principally of situation comedies, which accounted for 10 hours 45 minutes of programmes that are still shown today, such as *Butterflies*, *Last of the Summer Wine*, *'Allo 'Allo* and *Black Adder*. A substantial contribution was also made to this channel by fictional series, with a total of 6 hours of repeats. This included successful shows such as *Star Trek* and *Bergerac* amongst others. BBC1 was actually the only channel to have reduced its repeats by 2004 with a proportionate decrease of 3.7%. Fictional series dominated repeats in 2004 (totalling 9 hours 35 minutes), comprising mainly of

³ The tables 7.9 to 7.14 in Appendix C (pages 344 to 353) provide further detail on this because they outline the actual genres which were repeated and imported.

Neighbours, *EastEnders* and *Holby City*. Situation comedies amounted to 7 hours of repeats with classics such as *Only Fools and Horses* and *Open All Hours* along with the more recent *My Hero*, *Eyes Down* and *All About Me*.

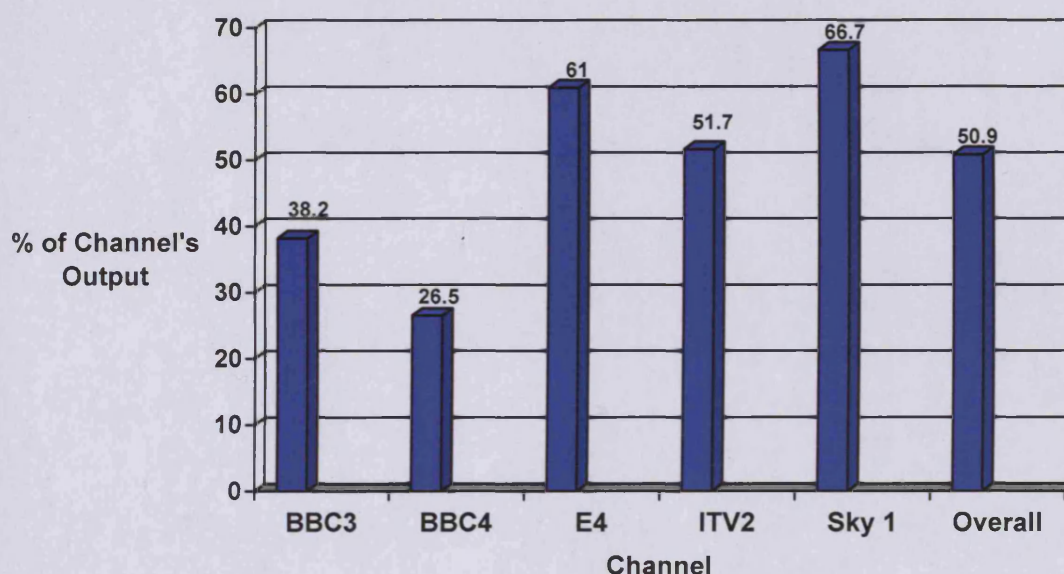
On BBC2 the proportion of repeats increased by 7.4% from 40 hours 10 minutes to 56 hours 25 minutes. The main genre to be shown again in both cases was documentary, 14 hours 10 minutes in 1984 compared to 14 hours 55 minutes in 2004. ITV proved to be the channel least reliant on repeats in both cases, although it had increased its proportionate rate notably. In 1984, only 9 and a half hours were repeats, comprised largely of 5 hours drama. By 2004, this had more than doubled to 23 hours 5 minutes, with a glut of 17 hours of fictional series such as *Heartbeat*, *A Touch of Frost* and *Footballers Wives* featuring heavily.

The upward trend continued with Channel 4, as it had just over 13 hours (6.2%) more repeats over the period, indicative of a rise from 27 hours 5 minutes to 40 hours 25 minutes. The 1984 repeats were made up chiefly of 11 hours of the 1960's classic domestic fictional series *Danger Man* and *Callan*, together with imports in the same genre such as *St. Elsewhere* and *Mississippi*. In 2004, this outlet's repeats were almost entirely constituted by 18 hours 5 minutes of fictional series such as *Sex and the City*, *Hollyoaks* and *Without a Trace*, together with 14 hours 50 minutes of situation comedies, most of which was actually *Friends*. Five also proved to be heavily dependent on repeats with 34 hours and 35 minutes of these programmes. This was dominated by 11 hours 50 minutes of fictional series such as *Law and Order*, *Charmed* and *CSI*, along with 11 hours of documentary.

Overall, it is clear that there has been a significant rise in both the amount and the proportionate rate of repeated programming on the terrestrial system. A 4% increase in repeats amounts to just over 79 hours (110 hours 20 minutes in 1984 compared to 179 hours 35 minutes in 2004), although this enlargement also reflects an extra channel. However, this analysis only observed peak hours (5pm-12 midnight), not night time programming in which the proportion of repeats is much higher. So, while there are more hours to fill, I did not look at those extra hours, but the basic service when most people watch television. The findings reveal that successful genres such as fictional series are often reshowed, sometimes in the same week or even the

same day (as is the case with soap opera). The repeating of certain popular genres then is a highly salient feature of the current terrestrial system, and is one area in which noticeable change can be observed. The manner in which high profile shows are broadcast again illuminates how the current terrestrial system makes more use of a successful programme type than was the case in 1984.

Figure 7.2 - Repeats: Digital 2004



Source: Author's Own Research

Figure 7.2 shows that the picture with digital television is quite different and poses a number of serious questions⁴. BBC3's output was composed of 57 hours and 20 minutes repeated programming, dominated by 19 hours of lifestyle shows such as *Body Hits*, *Little Angels* and *Guerrilla Homes*. The amount fell with BBC4, which had 39 hours and 45 minutes of repeats, made up chiefly of 19 hours and 20 minutes of documentaries. While these figures are notably higher than the terrestrial systems, the chart conveys the extent to which the private digital channels were heavily dependent on recycling particular types of programmes. E4 broadcast a massive 128 hours of

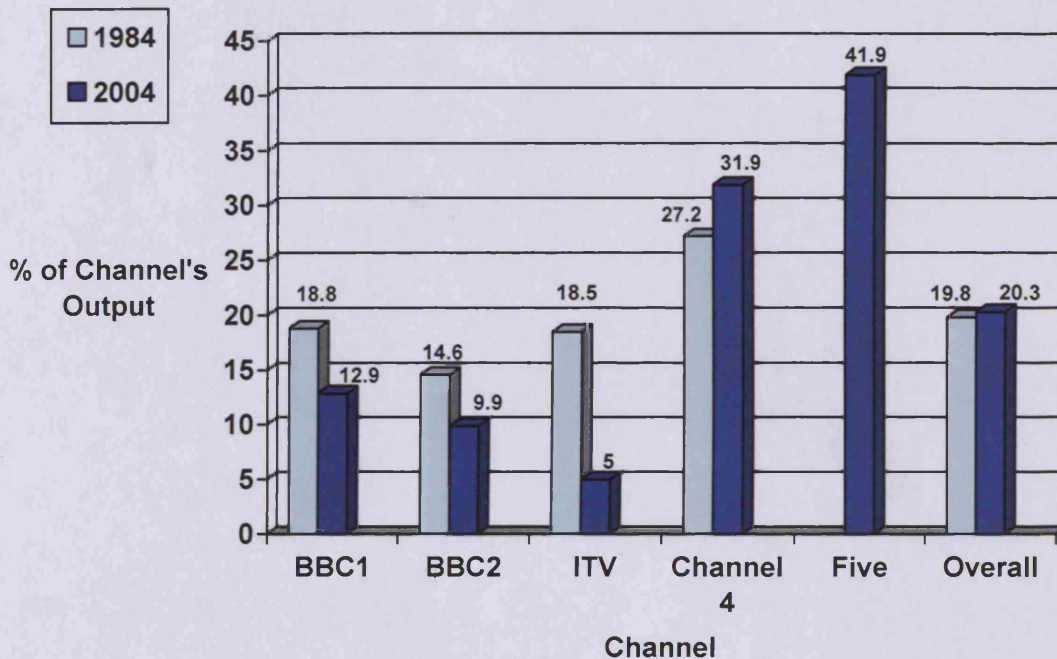
⁴ All of the figures for digital television's repeats refer, as explained in Chapter Two, only to programmes I am certain have been shown before. The actual figure is likely to be higher.

repeats, dominated by the situation comedy *Friends*, along with fictional series such as *ER*, *Dawson's Creek* and *One Tree Hill*.

More than half of ITV2's output was repeated, totalling 108 hours and 35 minutes. This was made up mostly by 41 hours 25 minutes of reality shows such as *The Block*, *Judge Judy* and *The X Factor*, aided by 22 hours 45 minutes of the soap opera *Coronation Street*. Exactly two thirds of Sky1's programmes were repeated, forming a vast 140 hours of its entire 210 hour schedule. This was composed mostly of fictional series, with 73 hours of the *Star Trek* off-shoots *Enterprise* and *Voyager* appearing daily, together with others like *Deadwood*, *24* and *Law and Order*. There was also 50 hours 10 minutes of situation comedies, whereby *The Simpsons*, *Malcolm in the Middle* and *Oliver Beene* featured regularly. Figure 7.2 also illustrates that Sky1 is the worst performer in the sense that it had the largest proportion of recycled programming. This is important because it is the only new broadcaster in the mix and, despite being so well-resourced, has had to rely on repeats for two thirds of its output. It would seem from this that adding further players to the broadcasting system does not necessarily mean more programming as additional ventures are highly likely to make extensive use of a back catalogue.

Overall, the digital channels are heavily reliant on repeats for their output, as more than half of their schedule was composed of recycled material. Scrutinising the schedules revealed the full extent of this, where repeats did not just amount to the constant broadcasting of a successful genre, but very often the same series, and quite frequently the actual programme being reshownd the same day. The tendency for terrestrial television to increasingly repeat popular programme types has intensified sharply on the digital channels. For this reason, it seems that channel proliferation is causing broadcasters to fill the expanding airtime with the same brands of popular genres. This trait must be a serious concern in regards to encouraging 'refuseniks' to digital television, because those who are satisfied with terrestrial may indeed find little to please them on the digital off-shoots if such a high proportion of their fare is repeated. A low proportion of first run material is broadcast on the private digital channels, much of which ends up on their terrestrial equivalents soon after (especially in the case of E4 and ITV2), and this inability may inhibit their development to a wider audience base to that which they have already garnered.

Figure 7.3- Comparison of the Terrestrial Systems: Imports



Source: Author's Own Research

Figure 7.3 displays the relative amount of imported programming between the terrestrial systems. By and large it had actually fallen in most cases despite an incremental overall rise. In 1984, BBC1's output was made up of 39 hours 10 minutes of foreign programmes, almost a fifth of its entire schedule. This was comprised of mostly 23 hours 25 minutes of film. By 2004, the amount of imports the channel broadcast had decreased to a total of 27 hours 5 minutes across the whole month. Again, film was the dominant category with 17 hours and 55 minutes, along with 9 hours 10 minutes of the soap opera *Neighbours* (coded as fictional series).

BBC2 also revealed a significant drop, as it had reduced its imports from 30 hours 10 minutes to 20 hours 50 minutes. In 1984, the channel imported 17 hours and 20 minutes of film, while in 2004 this genre totalled 10 hours 40 minutes. While the remainder of BBC2's imports were quite evenly dispersed through several categories in 1984, by 2004 the channel had concentrated largely on situation comedies with

Arrested Development, *Fresh Prince of Bel Air* and *Malcolm in the Middle* forming 8 hours of the non-domestic product.

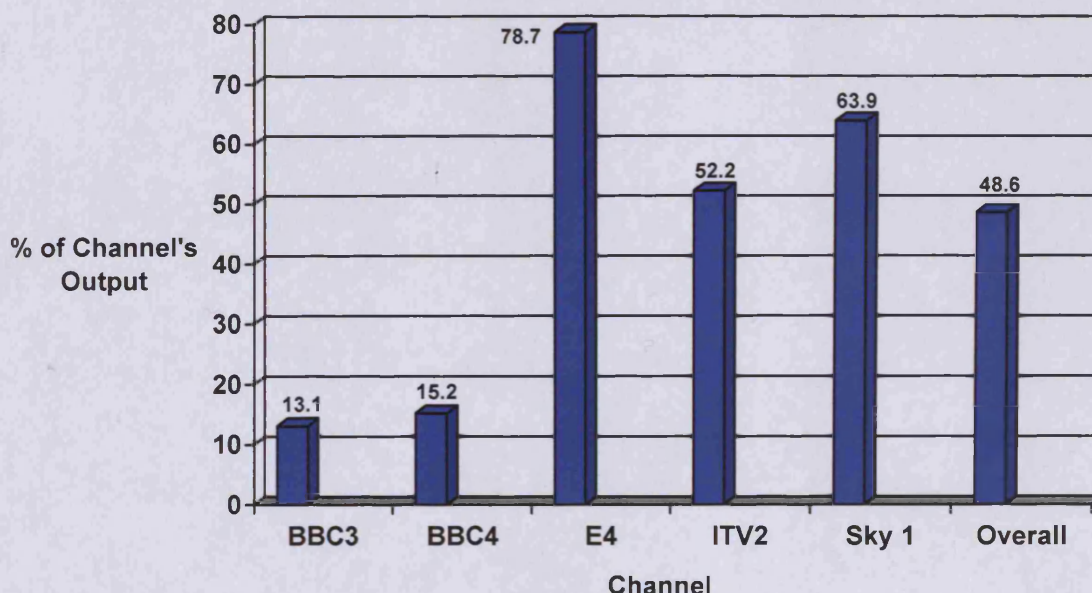
A more dramatic drop in imports can be seen with ITV, falling from 38 hours 50 minutes in 1984 to 10 hours 35 minutes twenty years later, a proportionate decline of just over 13% or more than 28 hours. In 1984, ITV imported a total of 15 hours 40 minutes of fictional series such as *Magnum*, *Quincy* and *Knight Rider*, while in 2004 its entire import quota was composed of film. Channel 4 bucked the trend because it increased its imports slightly from 56 hours 50 minutes to 66 hours 55 minutes in the period, a proportionate rise of 4.7%. In 1984, film accounted for more than half of this with 30 hours 55 minutes, along with 15 hours 25 minutes of the situation comedies *Alice*, *Reggie* and *WKRP in Cincinnati*. The channel's 2004 imports were again heavily made up of film, with 23 hours and 15 minutes, although this lagged behind the 25 hours 20 minutes of fictional series that included *The Sopranos*, *West Wing* and *Six Feet Under*.

Five meanwhile, broadcast a colossal 88 hours 5 minutes of imports so that more than 40% of its schedule was in fact foreign programmes. Most of this was composed of films, with 46 hours 35 minutes of this category alone, while fictional series such as *Home and Away*, *Charmed* and *Law and Order* totalled 32 hours 5 minutes. Figure 7.3 also illustrates that it is the old terrestrial channels that are making programmes, while the newer services, such as Five, are reliant upon cheaper imports for a substantial proportion of their output. Thus, it is highly likely that increasing the volume of channels will increase the proportion of imports because a direct correlation exists between a channel's age and its reliance on imported programming.

Overall then, the marginal increase in the proportionate amount of imports between the years can be attributed to how Channel 4 and Five depend on buying in foreign material, particularly for their prime time slots. It was not unexpected to find that Channel 4 had many imports in 1984, as it had only begun broadcasting less than two years previously. It was a little surprising then to discover that in 2004 it actually imported more material, although this was less than the amount broadcast by Five. It is evident from this data that these two channels do not specifically commission or make as much of their own material as the others, relying instead on certain formats

that are derived largely from the USA. However, it would not be fair to conclude that terrestrial television has become ‘Americanised’ as the proportionate rate remains broadly similar as most channels have actually cut their imports. Also, in 2004 a greater proportion of the imports were from countries other than the USA, such as Australia in particular. Given that the current listings revealed programming from a wider range of countries, the data is indicative perhaps of the international trading context that television is now situated within, reflecting a slightly more internationally diverse output market.

Figure 7.4 - Imports: Digital 2004



Source: Author's Own Research

Figure 7.4 confirms that in regards to the digital channels, it was the BBC channels who concentrated mainly on transmitting domestically produced programming, as the commercial digital outlets were heavily reliant on imported material. The entertainment channel BBC3 was quite different from its private counter parts in that its output was made up of the relatively low figure of 19 hours 40 minutes of imports. This encompassed 16 hours 45 minutes of film and 2 hours 55 minutes of the situation comedy *Good Girls Don't*. BBC4's schedule contained a similar amount with 22 hours 50 minutes of imports. Film formed 19 hours 55 minutes of this total, although these differed in origin from the American films

broadcast on every other channel in both the years looked at by this study. BBC4's film imports were mostly European sub-titled Arts fare in accordance with the channel's high-brow ethos.

The situation differed markedly with ITV2, where more than half of its output (109 hours 40 minutes) was imported. This was made up chiefly of three genres, with film amounting to 42 hours, reality television (such as the daily *Judge Judy*) forming 29 hours and talk shows such as *Sally Jessy Raphael* and *Jerry Springer* totalling 23 hours 25 minutes. E4 was easily the most dependent on foreign programming, with more than three quarters of its schedule composed of imports, totalling 165 hours 15 minutes. Again, three genres dominated, and within these, it was often the same show that the channel broadcast repeatedly. Situation comedies, which by and large meant *Friends*, amounted to 55 hours 45 minutes of the imports, while fictional series such as *ER*, *One Tree Hill* and *The Sopranos* added up to 68 hours 10 minutes. Lastly, reality shows such as *Average Joe: Hawaii* and *The Next Joe Millionaire* contributed 34 hours 40 minutes of the channel's overall imports.

Sky1 also had a high amount of imported material, with 134 hours 10 minutes that was focused largely around two genres. Fictional series accounted for more than half of the channel's imports, because they totalled 73 hours 5 minutes, principally through the daily airing of the *Star Trek* derivatives *Enterprise* and *Voyager*, together with a regular evening slot devoted to high profile shows like *Deadwood*, *24* and *Cold Case*. It also had 47 hours of situation comedies, which again was mostly down to the frequent transmission of *The Simpsons*.

It is abundantly clear from this that imported programming has a major presence on the commercial digital channels, forming over half of the total output. It is the same shows which are repeatedly broadcast, before they end up (in the case of E4 in particular) on the parent channel. In short, very little original, domestic production is aired on E4, ITV2 or Sky1. This is quite a worrying trend because it reveals how far digital television is dependent on foreign material, repeats and a few high profile shows. Innovation is unlikely to thrive on these private digital channels as they have themed themselves around certain genres such as fictional series, situation

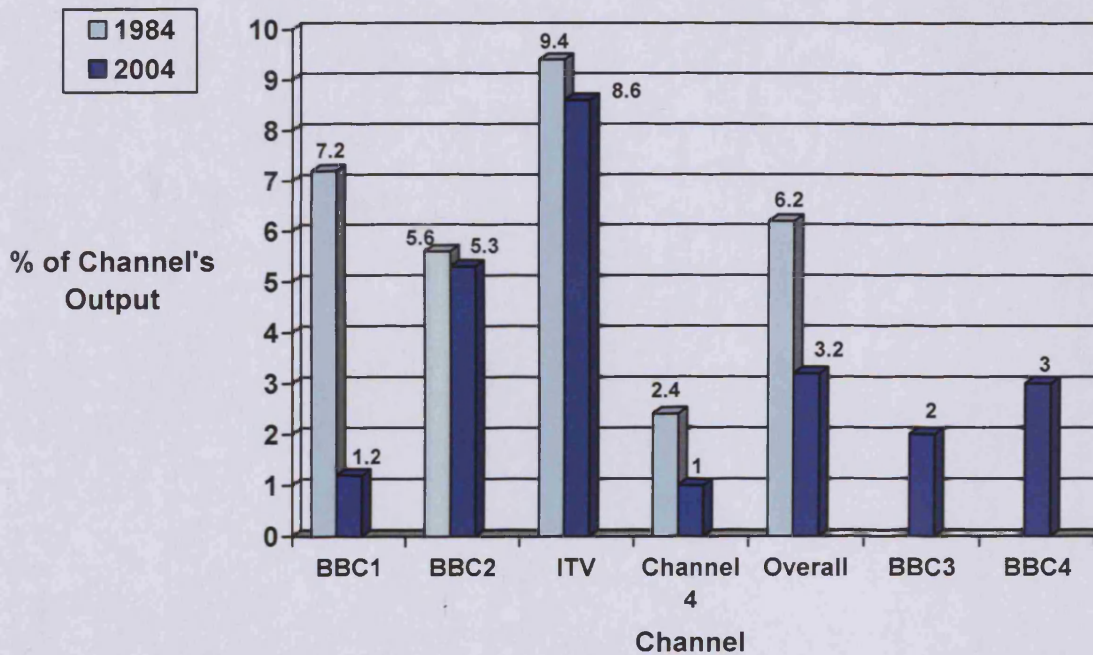
comedies and reality TV which help them to retain a stable audience base. The only diversity on the digital system is thus on the BBC channels.

The analysis so far has examined the programmes in terms of repeats and imports. Utilising these variables has made it possible to see how far which broadcasters were dependent on recycling and importing programmes. The figures revealed that although there was not that much difference between the overall rates within the two terrestrial systems, there were some notable increases on certain channels, especially commercial ones, which emphasises the manner in which they have developed. The data for the digital outlets however reveals a television system that is radically different in its utilisation of imported and recycled material, as the private channels in particular are dependent on such output for their schedules.

The remainder of this chapter details the main findings of the content study by highlighting the generic make-up of each channel and the overall systems. It is impossible to discuss all of the findings of the analysis conducted for the purposes of this chapter. I have therefore limited myself to illustrating those categories where change is most clearly manifest and which are central to the arguments of this thesis. Figures 7.5 to 7.14 provide a detailed account of the composition of each channel, and how the overall systems of 1984 terrestrial, 2004 terrestrial and 2004 digital compare in regards to the types of output⁵.

⁵ The overall tables are in the Overview section of the chapter while the remaining data can be found in Appendix C.

Figure 7.5 - The Coverage of Drama



Source: Author's Own Research

Figure 7.5 shows the relative proportion of drama on all of the channels that broadcast it. The classification of drama was used to group programmes that were generally seen to be atypical of the genre and to separate these from more mainstream content that I labelled as fictional series. Thus, serials on a particular theme, plays and period productions were counted as drama, while hospital series, soap operas and police shows were labelled fictional series. While this may appear to be arbitrary, the classification was used to distinguish between the different kinds of fictional entertainment. In other words, it was used to separate high brow entertainment from more mass market fare and was useful because it kept apart programmes that were one-off or short serials from those that were more long running.

A significant downward trend can be observed in the amount of time devoted to drama, including both one-off broadcasts and serials. The 1984 schedules contained a relatively high proportion of this genre (6.2%) across all channels, adding up to 51 hours and 25 minutes on the system. In 2004, the terrestrial outlets showed only 33 hours 45 minutes, a relative drop of 3%. BBC1 exhibited a strong commitment to

drama in 1984, as 15 hours of its output could be classified as such. This included period dramas like *Dombey and Son* and *The Barchester Chronicles* along with more contemporary offerings such as *Bird of Prey* and *Master of the Game*. In 2004, the same channel broadcast only 3 hours 25 minutes of the genre featuring *A Woman at War* and *A Thing Called Love*.

BBC2's drama output remained quite stable with 11 hours 35 minutes in 1984 compared to 11 hours 10 minutes in 2004. The main difference was of a qualitative nature, as the type of drama had changed. In 1984, the channel showed productions that could be thought of as atypical of this genre because they dramatized the lives of historical figures including *Freud* and *Marie Curie*. There were fewer of these programmes in 2004, and more docu-dramas like *The Grid* and *Crisis Command*, which provided fictional accounts of perceived realistic situations.

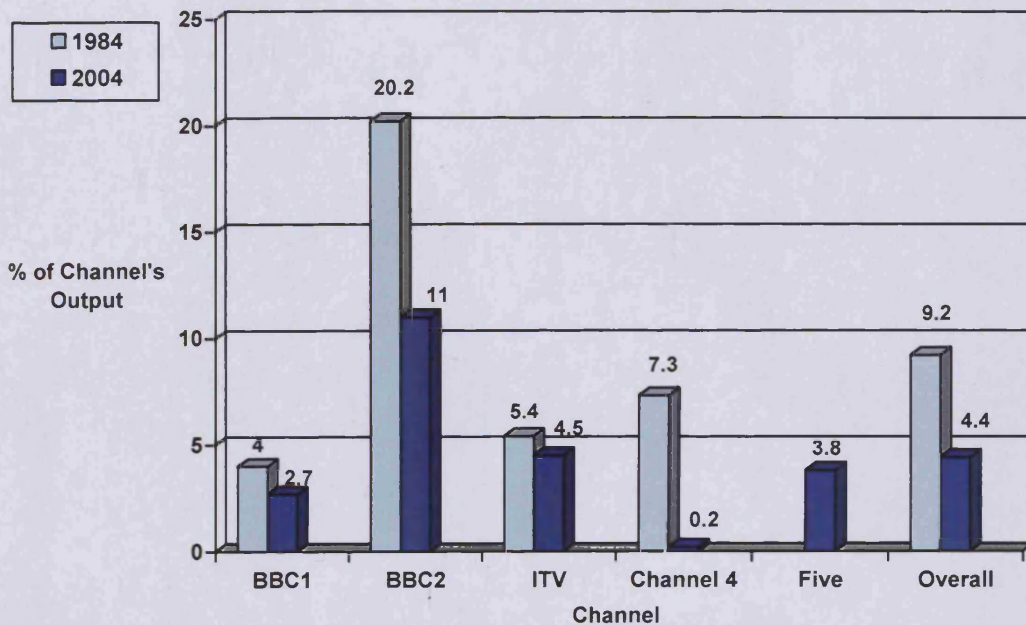
The same tendency could be seen on Channel 4, where the 5 hours in 1984 were made up entirely of the serial *Upstairs, Downstairs*. In 2004 it showed a single programme of 2 hours 5 minutes *The Hamburg Cell* that reconstructed the terrorist activities leading up to 9/11. It is evident from this that drama has evolved into new directions with the fictional accounts of real or potential situations replacing a more traditional approach of focusing on actual historical events and/or figures. ITV transmitted the most amount of drama in both years, although again this had fallen from 19 hours 50 minutes to 18 hours. In 1984 it showed *Return To Eden* and *Lace* (which perhaps are more deserved of the label mini-series) augmented by the more traditional *A Married Man* and *Hammer House of Horror*. By 2004, ITV1 showed the serial *Doc Martin*, along with a frequent commitment to one-off dramas that included *Dirty*, *Filthy Love* and *She's Gone*.

Five showed no drama whatsoever, just as the private digital channels steered clear of this expensive genre. The only drama on the digital channels could be found slightly on BBC3 (3 hours) and BBC4 (4 hours 35 minutes), a total that forms only 0.8% of the overall digital output. In fact, *the ten channels selected for 2004 broadcast less drama than the four terrestrial channels of 1984* with a total drop of just over 10 hours (51 hours 25 minutes in 1984 compared to 41 hours 20 minutes in 2004). The main finding here is that the terrestrial system of 1984 proved to be far

more committed to drama than the present time because its contribution exceeded that of the ten channels of 2004 combined. This can perhaps be explained by the high cost and risk, coupled with the possibility of low return associated with this genre. As dramas are by their very nature short-term, the possibility of hooking an audience in is less likely than with the long-run unfolding narratives that characterise some other commercially viable genres.

It seems that this has encouraged broadcasters from staying away from making or even importing such programmes. Drama is therefore a category that has come under increasing pressure in recent years to the extent that terrestrial broadcasters are not allocating as much of their resources to it as they once did, and the proliferating digital channels have neglected it almost entirely. My analysis is consistent with Barnett (2005:9) who found that while the single drama is almost extinct, the genre itself has developed into a variety of formats. A closer examination of the schedules confirmed this, as there were very few dramas on any of the hundreds of current outlets except ITV1. The only other place I could regularly find such programmes was, not surprisingly, on the UK Drama channel, all of which were repeats, many of which were, ironically, made during the 1980's.

Figure 7.6 - The Coverage of Sport



Source: Author's Own Research

Another sharp decline could be seen in the proportion and allocation of the terrestrial schedules towards sport as indicated by figure 7.6. BBC1's amount had declined from 8 hours 20 minutes to 5 hours 45 minutes by 2004. In both years its sports programmes were broadly similar, structured largely around football and athletics. The most significant drop was found on BBC2 where the provision of sport had virtually halved from 41 hours 40 minutes to 23 hours 5 minutes, signalling how its contribution had fallen from just over a fifth of the channel's total output to a little over tenth, a decline in excess of 18 hours. As important is the range of sports covered on BBC2, where in 1984 it showed ten different sports, the figure had declined to just six in 2004.

The tendency continued on ITV, although the drop only amounted to 1 hour 55 minutes from 11 hours 20 minutes to 9 hours 25 minutes. Channel 4 meanwhile, broadcast only a single sports programme in September 2004 and this half hour of cricket highlights signalled a drop of almost 15 hours from 1984 when it covered the same sport in far more depth, along with cycling and American football. Five also had

only a minimal amount of sports content with 7 hours 30 minutes, mostly revolving around European football matches.

While the sharp fall in the amount of sport on the terrestrial system was expected, the analysis did uncover some salient findings in regards to how broadcasters now approach the genre. In 1984, Channel 4 allocated only a solitary hour of programming to the Paralympics, while BBC2's coverage of the same event twenty years later amounted to a whole week, with at least a ninety minute programme each evening. This reveals that while sports provision as a whole has declined, terrestrial broadcasters are devoting much more time and resources to a single event. The depth of the transmission of any particular game or event has hugely increased, with far more build-up, discussion and indeed coverage itself of the sport concerned. This seems to have signalled a realisation on the part of broadcasters regarding how keen viewers are on these programmes and that they are interested in seeing far more than the sorts of extended highlights that characterised the coverage of 1984. This would go a long way to explaining the increasing prices attached to the subscription and pay-per-view of this genre that typifies the manner in which it is now available. However, given that the subscription channels of Sky have captured most of the high profile events through the company's ability to secure the rights, the remaining channels have had to work harder to build an audience for other events.

The digital channels selected for this study showed very little sport, working out as only 24 hours 15 minutes of the overall output. In fact, ITV2 was the only channel that had any real sports coverage with 16 hours 30 minutes (7.9%) of European football and Grand Prix. BBC3's figure was inflated by 6 hours 45 minutes (4.5%) of *Mind, Body and Kick Ass Moves*, that was coded as sport as the closest genre. Similarly, Sky1 had just a single programme (0.5%) *Dangerous Sports*. A close scrutiny of the schedules made it abundantly clear that most sporting events are gravitating towards the subscription channels of Sky, given that both the prices for the rights to broadcast and their cost to audiences have risen, indicative of the popularity with audiences. The coverage of this genre on the terrestrial channels is confined to fewer sports, which are then broadcast in more depth, whereas the specialist channels are saturated with an extensive range of high profile sports for which there is

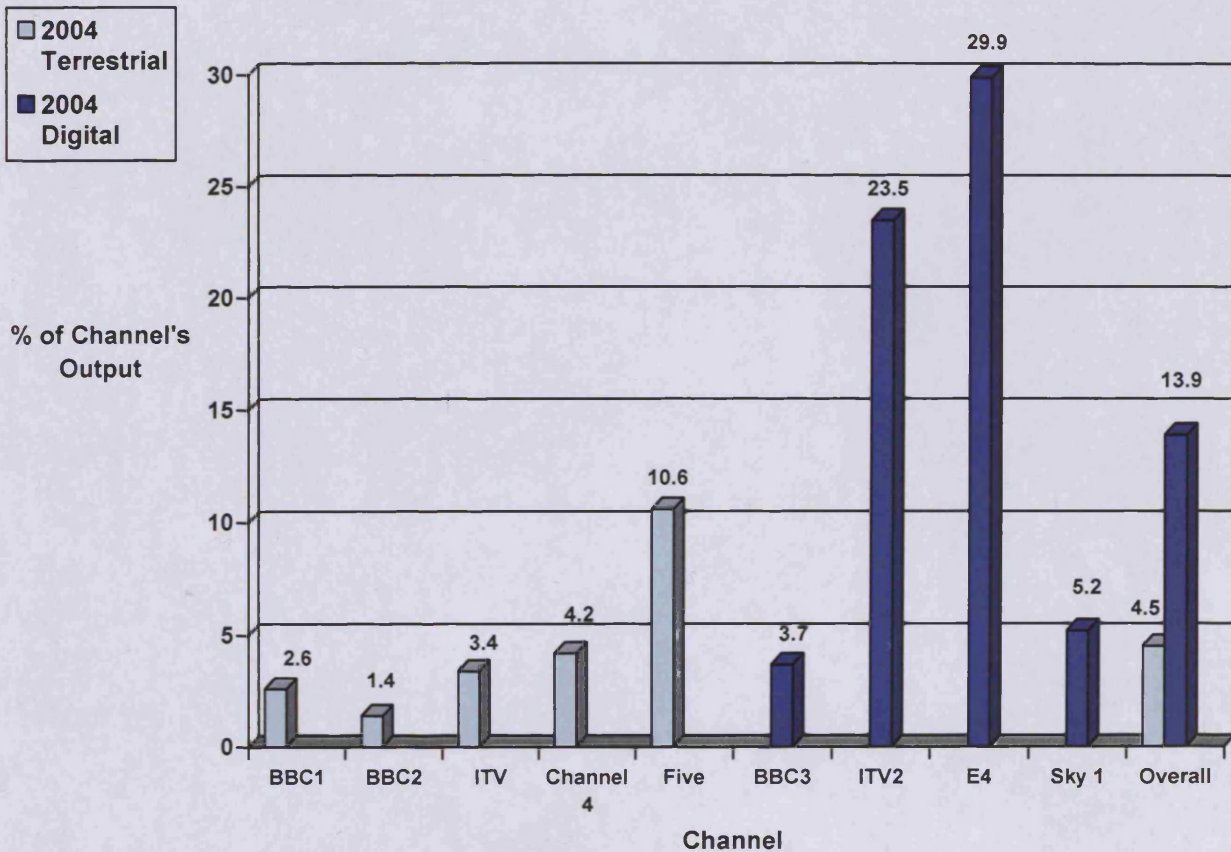
unremitting coverage. Hence, sporting events are more expensive to watch and seen by far fewer people.

The data confirm that there has been a quantitatively significant drop in this genre on terrestrial television over the twenty year period, both in terms of broadcasting time and the range of sports covered. Indeed, *the digital channels selected for this study, combined with the five terrestrial channels of 2004 showed less sport than the four channels of 1984* (70 hours in 2004 compared with 75 hours 35 minutes in 1984). It is clear that sport has become the cherished preserve of programming as broadcasters have realised how highly audiences value such content. This explains perhaps why it is concentrated into a certain niche where the return on the investment from the rights can be recouped. Despite its popularity, the Sky channels have been able to use sports programming as a loss leader, thereby encouraging viewers onto the platform because of its ability to act as the ‘battering ram’ for the company in its drive to pick up more subscribers. The message from this is that if audiences want sport they must subscribe to it for which they will receive thorough and extensive provision. For those without the financial means, exclusion from what had been a staple of the pre-digital era is an unavoidable consequence of the current broadcasting system and its clear technique of using such popular content increasingly as a privilege rather than as a right.

Another area where change has manifested itself is reality TV which has become a major component of both terrestrial and digital schedules, as displayed in figure 7.7. There was not enough such content in 1984 to form a category in its own right, although some basic traits of the format could be detected in a few programmes. So, while there were progenitors of the format, the total amount was negligible in percentage terms. BBC2 showed *The Penine Challenge*, in which a group of individuals were followed by a camera crew to see how they fared on a trek through the national park over a period of time. Meanwhile, Channel 4 broadcast an hour of *Case on Camera*, where a retired judge would preside over proceedings on everyday matters such as minor crimes and annoyances. This was designed to give viewers an insight into the workings of the law by recreating aspects of real situations. Both cases were early examples of the reality format, although the inability of viewers to shape the narrative and the participation of individuals meant they were variations of the

genre. Thus, even though reality TV has been around in some shape or other, its presence was decidedly confined to one-off appearances and the early form exhibited some but not all of the elements presently associated with it.

Figure 7.7 - The Coverage of Reality TV in 2004



Source: Author's Own Research

Figure 7.7 reveals how the experimental nature of reality TV provision has since developed into a staple part of the schedules, indicative of how it has become the most successful genre recently. In 2004, BBC1 broadcast five and a half hours of *Personality Test* and *Fat Nation*, while BBC2 devoted 3 hours to *Bank of Mum and Dad*. ITV provided more than double this with 7 hours 10 minutes, centring largely on

The Block and *The X Factor*. Channel 4 meanwhile, showed 8 hours 55 minutes of reality TV programmes, composed mainly of *That'll Teach 'Em* and *Going Straight*.

The most coverage on the terrestrial channels however was that of Five with a total of 22 hours 15 minutes. Its figure was inflated at the beginning of the month by the daily show *Cosmetic Surgery Live* with uninterrupted actuality of operations from the USA. When this series ended, it was replaced by *The Farm*, where a group of celebrities partook in a number of activities set around a farm until they were voted off. At the end of the month a new series, *Celebrity Detox Camp* occupied the channel's evening schedules. Five therefore exhibited a strong commitment to reality TV, a fact demanded by the structural elements of the format where daily coverage of the latest happenings is a crucial element towards the development of the overall narrative. Its devotion to the genre can be conveyed by the manner in which the channel had a series follow one that had just finished.

Overall, the terrestrial system in 2004 devoted 46 hours 50 minutes (4.5%) of its entire output to this genre with significant amounts on all the channels, augmented by the high levels on Five. While significant, this was considerably lower than I expected and, by my estimation, far less than at most other times of the year when one of the big reality shows has come to occupy the prime time slot of a channel throughout its entire series. The analysis did reveal that this genre has emerged as an increasingly centralised feature of the schedules, probably because it requires a specific type of concentrated coverage for viewers to keep in touch with its constantly unfolding plots.

The digital channels were much fuller in their coverage of this genre on all but the BBC outlets. BBC4 did not show any reality TV programmes at all, while BBC3 had 5 hours 35 minutes of *End of Story* and *David Ginola: Secrets and Lies*. Sky1 spent 11 hours on this genre, mostly through *Road Raja* and *Teenage Kicks*. Meanwhile, ITV2 broadcast a massive 49 hours 25 minutes, or nearly a quarter of its complete schedule, on reality shows. These included *Judge Judy*, which appeared every week day evening and appeared quite similar to the Channel 4 programme of twenty years previously. On top of this were repeats and derivatives of *The Block* and

The X Factor, where the main show from the parent channel was reshowed and supplemented with follow-ups that focused on the main characters.

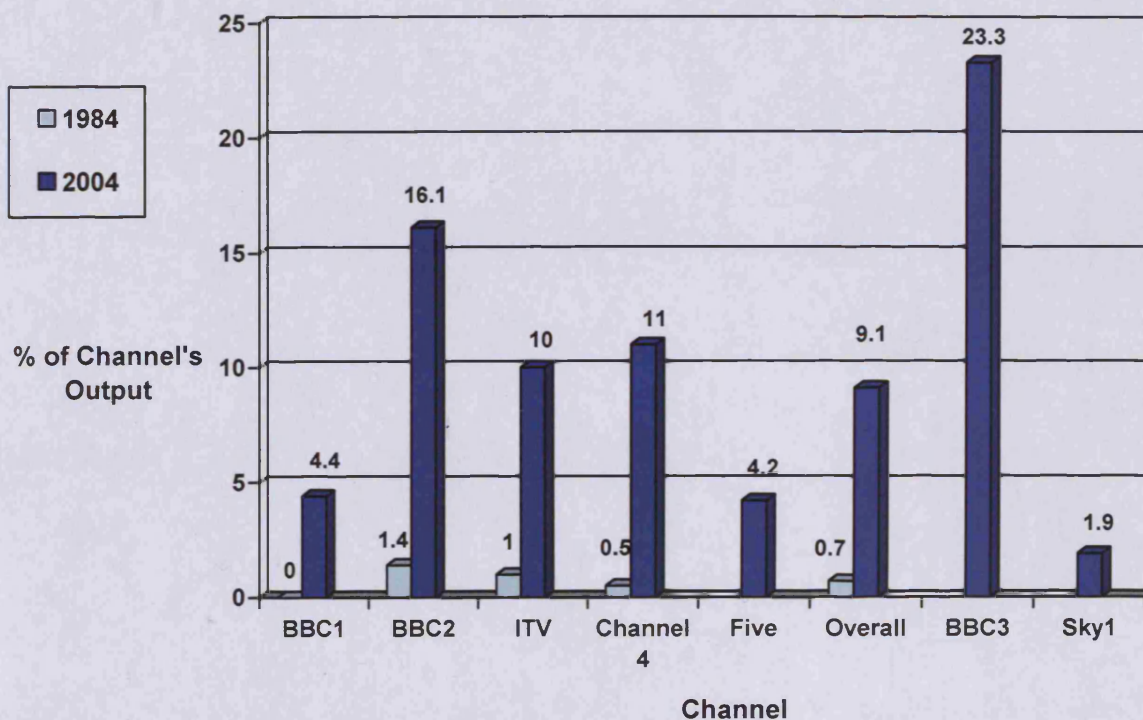
E4 also had a huge commitment to reality TV as almost a third (29.9%) of its entire output was made of this programme type, totalling an enormous 62 hours 50 minutes. This included the regular *Wife Swap*, *Faking It* and *Can You Pull...?* amongst a multitude of others. It is E4's contribution that skewed the overall amount on the digital channels selected to 128 hours 50 minutes (13.9%), where it was in fact the second most prominent genre on the whole system. In summary, the data confirm that while reality TV is a mainstay of the current terrestrial system, it has become the bulwark of some of the digital channels who rely on it almost exclusively for their prime time slots. Reality shows have a format that is structured around continuous engagement with viewers, whose ability to shape developments is integral to the development of the plot and involves using other technological developments, such as related websites and text messaging. The complementary channels of the digital system afford broadcasters the opportunity to connect viewers with all of the action as it unfolds, along with reactions to key moments.

Reality TV therefore occupies a heavy proportion of some of the digital channels by tying in with the provision on the related terrestrial channel, many of which have assigned significant amounts of time to this genre. Rather than diversity, the contribution of the digital channels in this instance is to provide more depth towards the same programme type, allowing audiences to engage more often and devote more time to this genre in particular. Therefore, reality TV is in many ways an ideal format for a multichannel system because its relatively cheap cost and ability to provide unremitting coverage meets the requirement for the digital channels to fill their schedules.

Similar patterns are evident with another popular form of content. Figure 7.8 illustrates clearly the proliferation of an old, once marginal genre and its progression towards becoming a mainstay of the terrestrial schedules, both in terms of amount and through its primetime placement. Lifestyle programmes, such as those concerned with gardening, cooking, home, health and career have multiplied to such a degree that they form 95 hours 50 minutes (9.1%) of the 2004 terrestrial content. This denotes a

huge enlargement of 89 hours 50 minutes from 1984 when they amounted to less than a single per cent of the output totalling just 6 hours across the 4 channels.

Figure 7.8 - The Coverage of Lifestyle Programming



Source: Author's Own Research

Figure 7.8 shows that in September 1984, BBC1 had no lifestyle programmes at all, but by 2004 this had increased to 9 hours 15 minutes with *Ground Force*, *Changing Rooms* and *What Not to Wear*. The largest increase could be found on BBC2, where lifestyle programming has become the channel's most dominant genre, outstripping all the others that it has historically been committed to. In 1984, BBC2 broadcast 3 hours of a weekly gardening show and a one-off programme on weddings. By 2004, this had grown to 33 hours 50 minutes of more frequent gardening programmes, regular cooking shows such as *Ready, Steady, Cook* and others like *Get a New Life* that focused on changing personal and career circumstances.

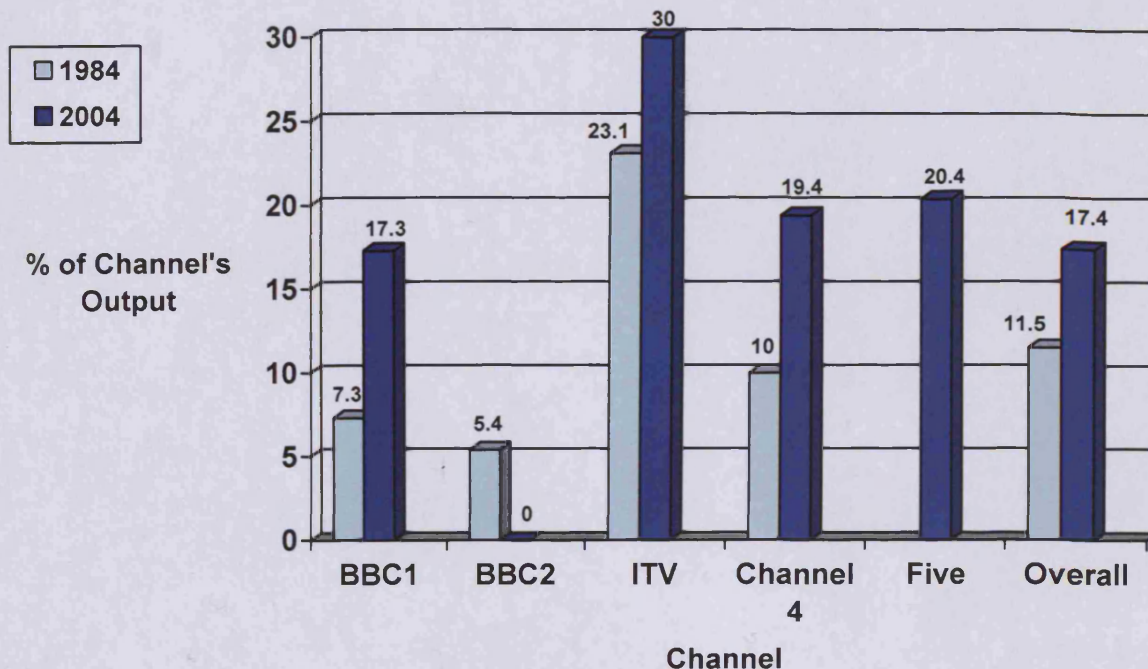
ITV continued this upward trend as its coverage had increased more than ten fold from 2 hours to 21 hours. The clear systemic shift is confirmed by the way in which a weekly half hour health show had transformed into a daily one hour makeover programme. Channel 4 also allocated more of its resources to this programme type, as the two half hour gardening shows in 1984 had increased to 23 hours in 2004. This included numerous programmes on buying houses and/or improving them, new lives abroad or making over individuals. Five also broadcast a significant amount of this genre with 8 hours 45 minutes made up by *Ten Ways to Get on the Property Ladder*, *How to be a Property Developer* and *House Doctor*.

The digital channels, other than BBC3, have not adopted this genre although there are specialist outlets like UK Living. Of the digital channels selected, BBC3 relied on this format as its main output type, transmitting 35 hours (23.3%) in total. This was made up by daily shows such as *Body Hits* and *Little Angels*, along with frequent airings of *Who Rules the Roost?* and *Guerrilla Homes*. Sky1 showed only 3 hours of a travel programme that, broadly defined, fitted this categorization.

All of this illustrates the extent to which terrestrial broadcasters have a significant commitment to lifestyle programming as it has grown from a marginal area of activity to becoming one of the most common genres, particularly within peak time. The BBC in particular, has embraced this format, applying its tenet of improving aspects of people's lives towards a plethora of areas, whilst extending its provision from a heavy presence on BBC2 to the digital off-shoot BBC3. This data is consistent with Barnett's (2005:9), whose own content study found that such programmes had quadrupled in the last 10 years to form 8% of peak time. It is clear from this that terrestrial broadcasters have unearthed genres either by reworking an old idea or by merging previously separate programme forms which, once successful, are launched into prime time in abundance. While this may explain the saturated coverage, it is also indicative of a lack of diversity on the part of broadcasters, perhaps through an inability to risk innovation because of the potential damage this poses to ratings. Thus, current television has a tendency to over supply a programme type that has been successful. The proliferation of lifestyle programmes and their occupation of prime time confirm that the present moment is the highpoint of this genre, mirroring the similar explosion of docusoaps approximately 5 years ago,

although whether it will steadily decrease in the near future in a similar fashion remains to be seen.

Figure 7.9 - Fictional Series: Comparing The Terrestrial Systems



Source: Author's Own Research

Similar trends can be further observed with a genre that is based solely around entertaining. Figure 7.9 demonstrates how fictional series, such as soap operas, police shows and hospital series have substantially increased across various levels in the period under study. BBC1's provision has increased in relative terms by exactly 10%, rising from 15 hours 15 minutes to 36 hours 15 minutes, an increase of 21 hours exactly. The composition in both cases was quite similar, as domestic productions dominated, augmented by a few big foreign series. In 1984, *Juliet Bravo*, *Cold Warrior* and *Bergerac* featured in prime time slots, along with the high profile imports *Star Trek* and *Dynasty*. By 2004, *EastEnders* provided much of this genre, along with *Holby City* and *Casualty*, while *Neighbours* appeared each week day.

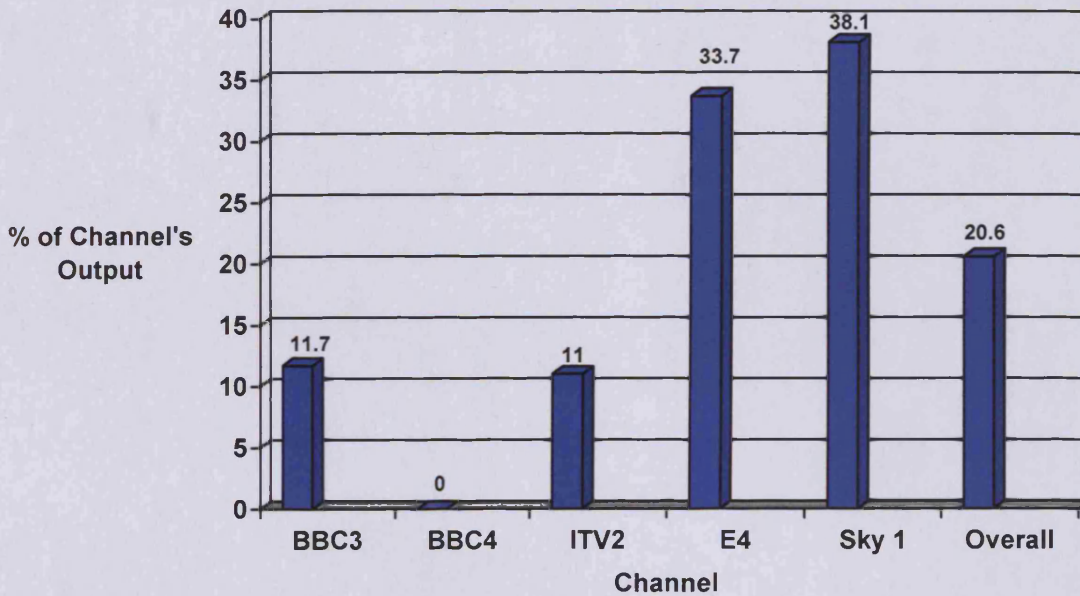
BBC2 actually displayed a total movement away from this genre, as the 11 hours 15 minutes of *Rockford Files* and *The Invaders* had dwindled to nothing by

2004. This could be attributed to the fact that the channel has concentrated on particular types of programming, as has been demonstrated in this analysis, and allowed other channels who rely on this genre to retain their concentration. The data for ITV in 1984 exhibited a similar mix of domestic and foreign productions in the break down of its fictional series as BBC1, albeit in a much higher overall amount. Its 48 hours 35 minutes of 1984 was made up by British series such as *The Gentle Touch*, *Crossroads*, *Emmerdale* and *Minder*, along with *Quincy*, *The A-Team*, *Magnum* and *Knight Rider* from the USA. This had risen to 63 hours in 2004, accounting for almost a third of the channel's overall output. The major difference could be found in how none of this larger amount was imported, instead being made up of additional episodes of soap opera, and home grown successes such as *The Bill*, *A Touch of Frost* and *Heartbeat*.

Channel 4's proportion of fictional series almost doubled, from 21 hours in 1984 to 40 hours 40 minutes. While it had domestically produced series in 1984 such as *Callan* and *Brookside*, it now relied on more imports like *The Sopranos* and *Sex and the City*, although it did show regular episodes of *Hollyoaks*. Five had just over a fifth of its schedule made up by this genre, totalling 42 hours 45 minutes. While this was made up entirely of imports such as *CSI*, *Charmed* and *Law and Order*, not all were American, with *Home and Away* appearing each week day.

It is clear from this that that fictional series comprise an increased proportion of terrestrial output, having risen from 96 hours 5 minutes to 182 hours 10 minutes, a relative increase of 5.9% between the two years. It would appear that fictional series are a by-product of the more competitive ethos that lies at the heart of the current television system. Historically, this genre has been one of the most thriving in terms of viewing figures, as the sequential nature of an unfolding plot over several episodes has successfully held audiences. The danger of such success is that there could be a glut of these shows, as this data raises, where broadcasters stick to a successfully proven formula, particularly during peak time. This trait can be detected by the manner in which weekly episodes of soap operas have increased and high profile series are repeated. These findings echo those of Barnett (2005:9), who found that in the last 10 years soap operas have almost doubled and are now approaching 10% of peak time output.

Figure 7.10 - Fictional Series: Digital Television



Source: Author's Own Research

The trends that typify terrestrial coverage concerning fictional series have intensified on the commercial digital channels, as illuminated in figure 7.10. More than a fifth of the output (20.6%) on the 5 channels selected was made up by these programmes, adding up to 191 hours 30 minutes in total where it occupied more airtime than any other genre. A significant proportion of this was located on E4 and Sky1, both of which devoted more than a third of their schedule to these programmes. Sky1 broadcast 80 hours 5 minutes, mostly through the *Star Trek* series *Voyager* and *Enterprise* featuring every week day. Additionally, some combination of *Deadwood*, *24* and *Cold Case* appeared each evening in prime time. A similar pattern was evident on E4, where 70 hours 50 minutes of *The Sopranos*, *ER* and *Line of Fire* amongst many others were shown each day. Given this tendency, it was a little surprising to find ITV2 had only 23 hours of such programmes, with no imported hits. Its fictional series output was comprised singularly of repeats and spin-offs from its ratings winner *Coronation Street*.

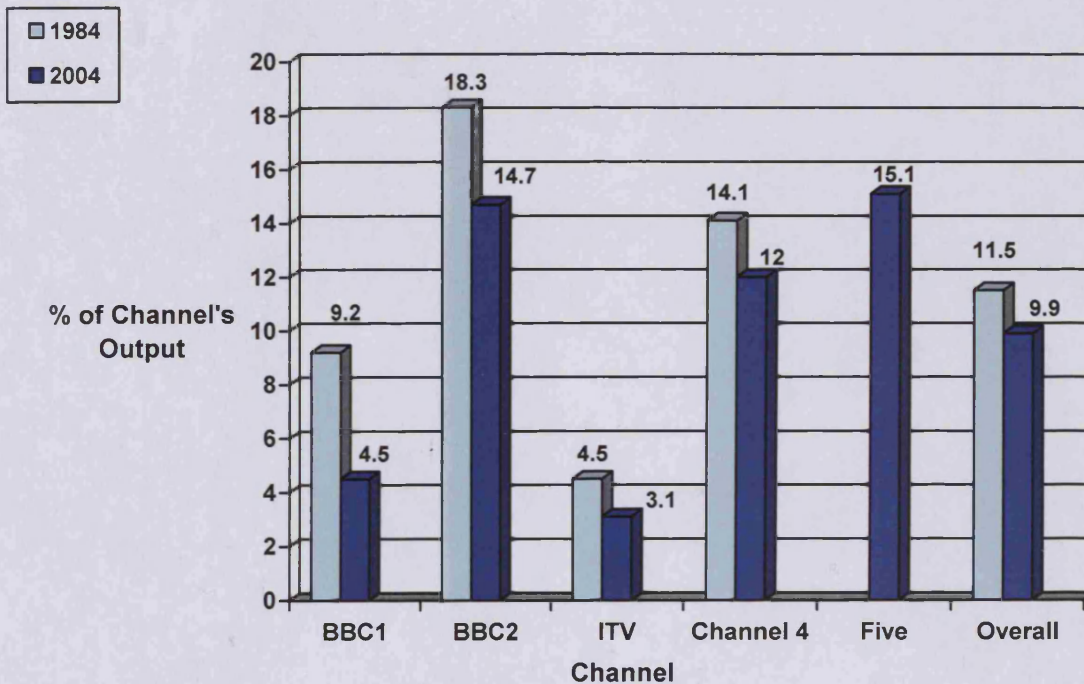
BBC3 was quite similar in this regard because its 17 hours 35 minutes of fictional series was composed chiefly of repeats of *EastEnders*, or *EastEnders Revealed*, where an in-depth look at a prominent character would take place. The channel was more adventurous than its commercial counter-parts in that it did produce some series itself, such as *Burn It* and *Grease Monkeys*. As expected, there were no fictional series on BBC4 at all. In sum, while fictional series featured prominently in 1984 and were broadcast within prime time slots, they have risen sharply as a television genre due to their compatibility with the needs of a competitive system even though they are fairly expensive to produce. The only exception was BBC2, which had clearly steered away from them, quite possibly because of their preponderance elsewhere. Fictional series are a staple of both terrestrial and particularly digital television now, and a clear pattern emerges of the interchanging of such content between a terrestrial channel and its digital off-shoot. Much of the increase in the genre can also be accounted for by the addition of extra episodes and close derivatives of an audience winner, together with imports, rather than domestic versions of new shows.

The case of documentaries illuminated an opposite trend to fictional series as shown in figure 7.11. In 1984, more than a tenth of the entire schedule was made up of this programme type, totalling 95 hours 40 minutes across the four terrestrial channels. While this had risen to 103 hours 50 minutes in 2004, it signifies a proportionate decrease of 1.6% across the five channels. BBC1's documentary output in 1984 added up to 19 hours 15 minutes, many of which were part of regular series, such as *Omnibus*, *Everyman Profiles* and *Heart of the Matter*. This had more than halved by 2004 to 9 hours 30 minutes with series such as *The British Isles: A Natural History*. There were far fewer actual series in 2004, as most of the documentary output was confined to one-off programmes on a specific topic.

A sizable drop could also be seen on BBC2, as the 37 hours 40 minutes of 1984 had declined by just over 7 hours to 30 hours 35 minutes. In 1984, many of its documentaries again formed part of regular series, such as *Open Space* and *QED*, while there was a permanent spot for an Open University broadcast each week day at 5.00pm. The 2004 schedule of BBC2 revealed many documentaries within the

Storyville or *Horizon* strands (derived originally from BBC4), buttressed by a number of one-off programmes.

Figure 7.11 - Documentary: Comparing The Terrestrial Systems

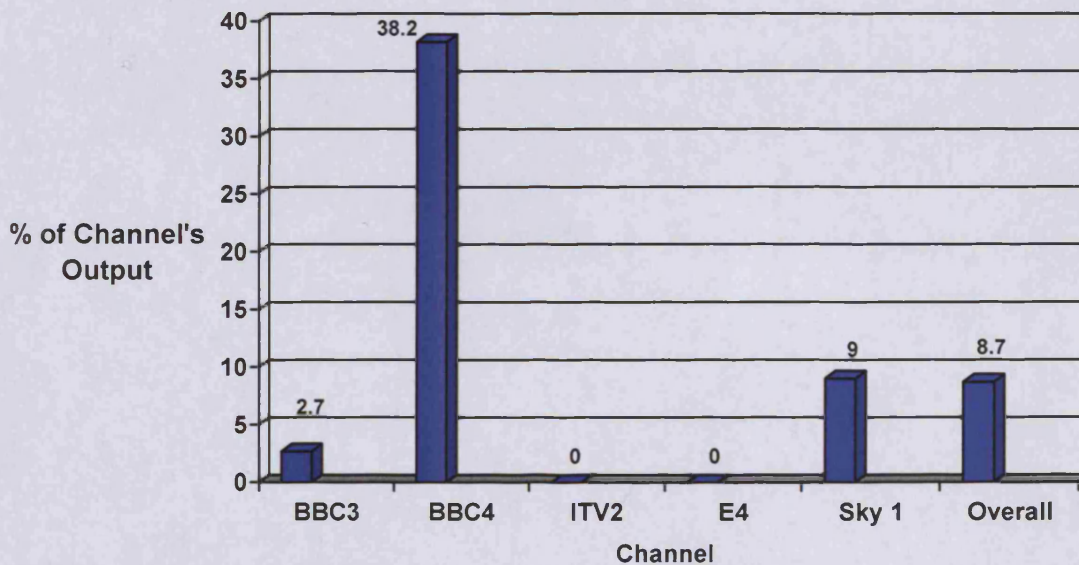


Source: Author's Own Research

Figure 7.11 indicates that ITV remained the least committed documentary channel, as its amount of the genre had fallen 1.4% from 9 hours 25 minutes to 6 hours 35 minutes. In both instances, most of its documentaries were broadcast after 11.00pm, with hardly any during prime time. Thus, ITV has proved to be the least committed outlet in regards to documentaries in both years of this study. There was also a drop of this genre on Channel 4, from 29 hours 20 minutes in 1984 to 25 hours 10 minutes, a figure that is alarming in that it exposes a higher amount at a stage when the station had only just begun broadcasting. This does provide valuable insight into the way in which the channel has developed, as will be demonstrated. In both years, it concentrated on either historically based documentaries or single programmes on a topical issue. Meanwhile, Five broadcast 31 hours 40 minutes of documentaries, many of which focused on nature or science, to form one its most heavily covered genres.

It was in scrutinising Five that changes of a more qualitative nature in this genre became evident. While its output was composed of many programmes with an investigative approach, it was clear that the tone was more quirky, exemplified by *The World's Strongest Boy* and *Bad Boys of Comedy* amongst others. Such programmes were stylistically different from traditional documentaries because of the subject-matter they concerned themselves with and the manner in which they covered the topics. Where this light-hearted approach was applied further still, a new category was created, as will be discussed shortly. So, while the terrestrial system showed a large number of documentaries in 2004, it was lower in relative terms than 1984 and a significant proportion of these were lighter in tone and/or approach. It seems that the documentary genre has been recast to include a newer style that may be more accessible, but is less probing in its pursuit of a range of quite different issues.

Figure 7.12 - Documentary: Digital television



Source: Author's Own Research

Figure 7.12 illustrates how this pattern continued on the digital channels where BBC3 had a mere 4 hours of documentary programming over the month, most of

which concentrated on the entertainment industry. ITV2 and E4 showed no documentaries whatsoever, while Sky1 broadcast the relatively high figure of 19 hours. However, its documentary content consisted entirely of the scientific *Brainiac* and the conjectural programme *Conspiracies*. Neither of these fitted into the traditional definition of 'documentary and educational' that had broken down the 1984 schedule neatly, both being centred around clear entertainment values. Both were counted in the same way that several programmes on Five were included with the caveat that they are indicative of a more quirky style that lies at the heart of contemporary factual programming.

The only channel where the documentary genre was well proportioned, in both the relative amount and the traditional style, was BBC4. It devoted 57 hours 25 minutes to this programme type, covering a multitude of issues in series such as *Storyville* and *Days That Shook the World*, together with frequent one-off programmes. It was BBC4's contribution that lifted the overall provision of the digital channels to 80 hours 25 minutes (8.7%), a figure still considerably lower than either of the other television systems.

While observing the factual programmes it became clear that a new classification was required in order to capture the full extent of change that has characterised the development of this genre. Several programmes encountered on the schedules went beyond the quirky nature discussed earlier in terms of subject-matter and style, concerning themselves with factual matter of a particularly bizarre and/or grotesque nature. These programmes tended to relay actuality on an issue and provide some associated commentary in a manner quite similar to docusoaps, the difference being their confinement to one-off episodes. Such observational series have fallen under the banner of factual entertainment according to OFCOM (2004b:43). However, I found it more pertinent to classify these programmes as 'the bizarre' because their subject-matter was often of an unusual nature and was covered in a style that seemed designed to confer relief on the part of the audience that such calamities had not befallen them. These programmes seemed to act as a sort of freak show and their preponderance on the schedules of certain channels indicated that they were not aberrations but a more permanent feature of current television output.

There were no such programmes in the whole month examined in 1984. Of the terrestrial channels in 2004, Five had 6 hours of *Hairy Women*, *Revenge On Your Ex*, *The Woman Swamped by Her Own Skin*, *Britain's Worst Pet* and *Drastic Plastic*. All were factual in the literal sense, but they were concerned with unusual subject-matter, which was then structured in an entertaining manner. Channel 4 broadcast 4 hours 10 minutes of *The Worst Jobs in History* that appeared quite similar. Although historical, the main task of this series was to uncover some of the dirtiest occupations there have ever been, most of which were concerned in some form or other with human discharge. Overall, this new category formed 10 hours 10 minutes (1%) of the terrestrial schedule, although it was a little surprising to find ITV1 had no such programmes in the month.

The digital channels broadcast a significant amount of bizarre programming totalling 18 hours 50 minutes that translates into 2.1% of the overall schedule. BBC3 had one and a half hours of *Sex, Warts and All* in night time slots. By far the most coverage of this category was to be found on ITV2, with the *Fattest Man In Britain* and the ...*From Hell* series, forming 11 hours 20 minutes (5.4%) over the month. It is the ...*From Hell* series which began and encapsulates the essence of this genre, where the thematic exposure of a certain misfortune is played out. ITV2 had a little over 10 hours of *Roads*, *Shopping*, *Tenants*, *Builders*, *Honeymoons*, *Gardeners*, *Homes*, *Journeys*, *Staff* and *Weddings* all *From Hell*. In fact, the prime time slot of September 7th was occupied fully by this genre, as the channel broadcast 3 such programmes consecutively. ITV2 has fully exploited this format, partly because of its limitless opportunities for subject-matter and also because the freakish tone seems to hold appeal. Sky1 also had a significant number of these programmes, mostly in the *Toughest Pubs in Britain* series, adding up to 6 hours or 2.9% of its total output.

Bignell (2004:126) explains that since their emergence in 1997 these programmes focus on the dramatic at the expense of the contextual frameworks that were the hallmarks of the documentary genre, a consequence, he feels, of the failure to explain the behaviour being observed or the reasons for its existence. The need to devise another category is captured by the manner in which these programmes address viewers in a manner different to that of the documentary genre, reflective of the array of freakish issues that are being covered in stylistically less challenging ways. The

nature of these programmes suggests a new found affinity with audience needs, but also a movement away from the traditional approach of context and probing that characterised the documentary genre which has fallen overall while this category has grown. The emergence of bizarre programmes as a variation of the documentary indicates a tabloidesque shift in television's priorities, where certain topics will be pursued because of their unusual nature, and are subsequently formulated in a titillating manner that supersedes the need for understanding.

There were yet more factual programmes that shared common characteristics with each other, yet which could not be labelled documentary. A further genre of 'real life crime' was observable in the schedules of 2004, whose subject-matter is self explanatory. These programmes were also concerned with misfortune, but were not as light-hearted as the bizarre category owing to the nature of the content, most of which focused on the circumstances of a crime or the real life footage of police chases. BBC1 had 7 hours 5 minutes of *Crimewatch*, *Man Hunt* and *Traffic Cops*, while the rest of the terrestrial channels were limited to one off programmes that recorded a famous criminal act. In total, the terrestrial system of 2004 broadcast 11 hours 40 minutes (1.1%) of real life crime. The digital channels showed a similar overall proportion of 1% that translated into 9 hours 20 minutes. This was concentrated on ITV2 with 5 hours 20 minutes programming that mostly looked at high profile murder cases, and Sky1, with 4 hours of *Street Wars*.

It was also necessary to construct another category that was absent from the 1984 schedules. Both the terrestrial and digital channels of 2004 had a significant number of programmes that were again factual, but which focused on the lives of the rich and famous. These programmes were again light in tone because their chief purpose was to relay information about the stars, hence the label 'celebrity news'. BBC1 had 2 hours of these, while ITV1 was composed of 2 hours 30 minutes and Five broadcast 4 hours 20 minutes. The terrestrial system as a whole was made up of 8 hours 50 minutes (0.8%) of this programme type. The digital channels were composed of a similar number, with 8 hours 30 minutes (0.9%). BBC3 made up the bulk of this, through showing 7 hours 30 minutes (5%) of the regular programme *Liquid Assets*, where the estimated wealth of stars was unravelled. A one hour Celebrity awards show made up ITV2's low coverage. The analysis demonstrated that

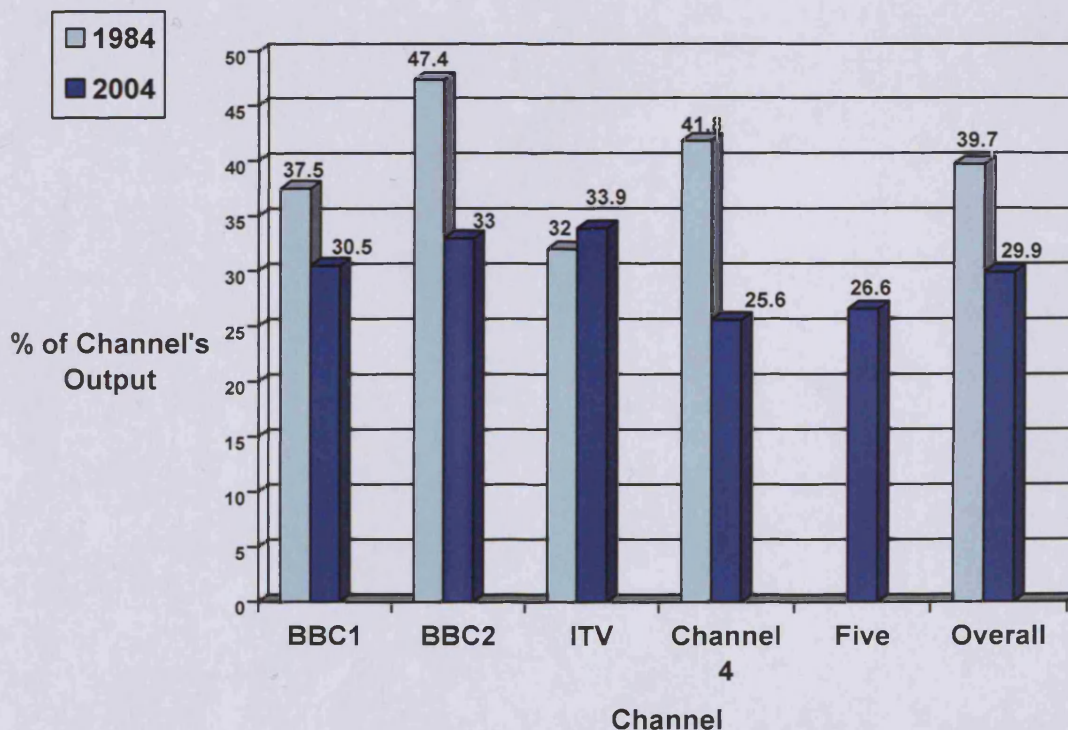
the lives of celebrities have become a more prominent feature of television output to the extent that programmes are devoted to the latest happenings in their lives.

Docusoaps were another such addition to the schedules, having not featured in 1984 at all. In 2004, they accounted for 11 hours 50 minutes (1.1%) of the terrestrial output. A little surprisingly, all of these were located on the public service channels. BBC1 showed 2 hours (1%) of *Cash in the Attic*, while BBC2 had 7 hours 30 minutes (3.6%) of *A Country House*, *Ditch the Day Job* and *A Seaside Parish*. Channel 4's docusoap provision was comprised of an entirely different nature to these with 2 hours 20 minutes (1.1%) of *The Osbournes*. The digital channels were made up of 26 hours (2.8%) of this genre, concentrated on three channels. Amongst these, BBC3 was by far the heaviest broadcaster of docusoaps with 16 hours (10.7%) of *Trauma*, *For Better for Worse* and *Spy*. ITV2 and Sky 1 had an identical amount of 5 hours (2.4%), with *Bad Lads Army* and *Airline USA* on the former, *Beauty School* on the latter.

Thus, docusoaps tend to inhabit certain channels disproportionately, digital more than terrestrial, the BBC more than the others, consequently forming a significant amount of the overall output. Bignell (2004:199) defines them as "the observation and interpretation of reality found in documentary with the continuing narrative centring on a group of characters in soap". It is the unfolding nature of the plot which explains their appeal, because it ensures a developing story-line where the characters and situations are unravelled over a certain period of time. This merging of previously distinct genres has at its core the need to entertain, because the structure apes that of the soap opera. Burton (2000:159) feels docusoaps are an example of present trends television has adopted of sourcing its material in reality before restructuring them into entertainment. In the process they are illustrative of what Hujanen (2000:78) refers to as a hybrid in the sense that they reflect a mixture of qualitatively different forms to construct something new. He feels this makes clear-cut distinctions between traditional categories, such as fact and fiction, more difficult and arises from the need to rearticulate old categories of programming to create new ones. By doing so, docusoaps are a cheap and viable method of capturing the audience, hence their emergence as a fulcrum of certain channels.

The analysis reveals that crime, celebrity and the freakish are significant elements of current television output to the extent that they form separate genres by themselves. Broadcasters have reworked the notion of factual programming in recent years to cover different types of subject-matter crafted around an approach that has its basis in entertaining rather than informing. Taken together, these emergent programme types of the bizarre, docusoaps, real life crime and celebrity news signal a new anchorage in television's provision of factual programming, replacing the traditional documentary format with a style that is structured around clear entertainment values. These observations echo those of Franklin (2001:115) in regards to the flourishing of different kinds of factual programming in recent years and which signal a departure from the more authentic documentary form. Similarly, OFCOM (2004b:50) uncovered how serious factual programming presently occupies fewer peak time slots and to an extent has been crowded out by factual entertainment programmes such as reality TV.

Figure 7.13 - Public Service Provision: Comparing The Terrestrial Systems



Source: Author's Own Research

Figure 7.13 graphically illustrates the relative amount of time allocated to public service programming across the terrestrial systems. This was achieved by adding together the contributions of those genres normally considered to embody public service principles namely news, current affairs, drama, documentaries, the arts, religion and classical music. This classification is consistent with OFCOM's (2004b:14) definition, although I did not use children's programming (like the regulator) because the time frame of this study began at 5.00pm each day, thereby generally avoiding the genre⁶. Figure 7.13 highlights a general movement away from public service on all but one of the channels, together with a sizable relative decline across the whole system.

In 1984, BBC1's share consisted of 78 hours 20 minutes (37.5%) of programmes that belonged to public service genres. This was composed mainly of news (34 hours 20 minutes) and documentaries (19 hours 15 minutes), buttressed by significant amounts of drama (15 hours), religion (4 hours 25 minutes) and classical music (3 hours 15 minutes). By 2004 the same channel's output of these sorts of programmes had fallen exactly 7% or 14 hours 10 minutes to 64 hours 10 minutes. While news had increased by 5 hours 55 minutes and current affairs rose by 3 hours 45 minutes, all the other public service genres declined. Most were big drops, as documentary had halved, drama fell by more than 5% and religion sharply declined as has been discussed elsewhere. Arts programming remained at about the same level.

A much sharper contrast is visible through BBC2's schedules, where the 1984 figure of 97 hours 50 minutes fell to 69 hours 30 minutes, a total loss of just over 28 hours (14.4%). In 1984, the channel's output was composed of high amounts of documentary, news, classical music and drama. All of these had fallen in 2004, with documentary declining by 6 hours 45 minutes, news by 4 hours 50 minutes, classical music by 10 hours 35 minutes and drama 25 minutes. In sum, BBC2's commitment to public service had fallen from almost half of its entire schedule to just under a third, a serious worry for the survival of this broadcasting philosophy on an outlet that has historically exemplified its spirit.

⁶ See Appendix B on page 342 for a full explanation of this.

Only ITV bucked the trend, with a proportionate increase of 1.9%, an actual rise of 3 hours 45 minutes from 67 hours 30 minutes to 71 hours 15 minutes. Despite this, some of the same genres had fallen such as drama (1 hour 50 minutes) and documentaries (2 hours 50 minutes), while current affairs remained roughly the same. The expansion can be attributed to the greater news provision, which rose by 5.1% or 9 hours 10 minutes. This was not through any extra news programmes, but by increasing the length of the bulletins, as the early evening news has come to occupy a full hour as opposed to the 45 minute slot of 1984.

The downward decline was most marked on Channel 4 with a loss of 33 hours 50 minutes, a relative rate of 16.2% from 87 hours 15 minutes to 53 hours 25 minutes. This can be accounted for by noticeable cuts in documentary (4 hours 10 minutes), arts (16 hours), current affairs (9 hours 5 minutes) and drama (2 hours 55 minutes). Moreover, the reductions in classical music (4 hours 35 minutes) and religion (3 hours 5 minutes) are indicative of total declines as they were not covered at all by this channel. Some of these losses were slightly offset by a 6 hour (2.9%) increase in news, although again this was through longer rather than more broadcasts. This shows what happens when regulation forces a public service outlet like Channel 4 towards a more commercial approach. Particular genres are cut while others are aired in greater proportion to confirm a direct correlation between the types of programming and the systems of regulation. Five actually had slightly more public service programming than Channel 4 in 2004, with 55 hours 40 minutes. Nearly all of this was proportioned between news and documentary, the latter of which was more than any channel looked at by this study other than BBC4. However, Five's commitment to documentary masks a conceptual abnormality in the genre that has been discussed.

This data illustrates how the comparative amount of output garnered through public service genres has eroded substantially on nearly all of the terrestrial channels, with an almost 10% decline in the relative provision of the two systems. In fact, *there is less actual public service programming on the 5 terrestrial channels of 2004 (314 hours 55 minutes) as compared to the 4 channels of 1984 (330 hours 55 minutes)*. This equates to a total loss of exactly 16 hours despite there being an extra outlet. The only significant increases are in news, where the main evening bulletins on BBC1 and

ITV1 have been extended slightly, which over the course of a month adds up to a healthy amount. However, in both cases the flagship news programmes have been placed later in the schedule, with BBC1's moving from 9.00 pm to 10.00 pm, and ITV's late bulletin shifting from 10.00 pm (after a protracted period of trial and error) to 10.30 pm. It seems as if broadcasters have pre-empted many of the criticisms associated with instituting a more competitive framework by increasing their news provision, although the later placement in the schedule confirms how rating considerations have ultimately affected the broadcasting of this key genre.

In virtually every other respect though it is abundantly clear that traditional public service genres have sharply fallen, which taken together illuminate a sizeable drop for the whole terrestrial system. Those genres that do not perform in the ratings driven environment of current times will feature less, and through this it could be said with confidence that the character of television has shifted. The change is most likely to be rooted within the competitive conditions which exemplify current television practise and its need to keep costs low. OFCOM's (2004b:10) analysis of output between 1998-2002 supports this view, because it showed how many of the genres typically thought of as public service have been increasingly marginalised, as confirmed by the manner in which arts and classical music had decreased on all channels except BBC2 in the period of the analysis. Its research argued that the growing fragmentation of the audience has applied intense pressure on mainstream channels to the extent that it is becoming harder for the public service ethic to find a place within the schedules. The regulator also found reductions in both the volume and investment towards public service genres during 2003, as it concluded that competitive pressures have been leading viewers away from challenging and serious output, especially in multichannel homes (OFCOM, 2004b:40).

Surprisingly, my data suggests that ITV1 is presently the most committed public service broadcaster in terms of airtime in 2004. This was unexpected because the channel has attracted much of the criticism for being the embodiment of an entertainment led outlet. Such figures emphasize the orientation of the whole system, as indicated by the manner in which both BBC channels have moved towards the types of output that are intended to secure high audience figures, reflective of the manner in which the Corporation itself has wholeheartedly adopted the ratings game.

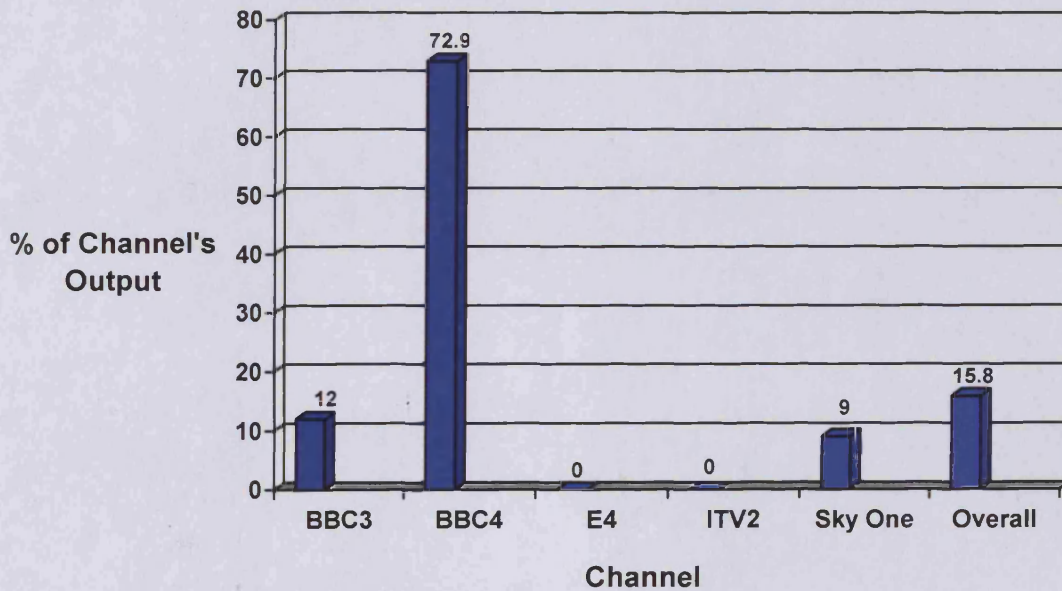
BBC2 in particular has the increasing look of an entertainment channel as its schedules reveal an altogether different set of priorities in comparison with 1984. Similarly, Channel 4 has become less distinguishable from other outlets because the minority interests it served from its inception have been pushed aside somewhat as high profile, mainstream hits have come to define its prime time slots. It will be increasingly difficult for public service broadcasting to thrive in such conditions when it patently runs counter to the logic within terrestrial television at the moment. Structural change has therefore impacted upon the types of content made within the overall broadcasting environment to pinpoint a very different programming make-up as compared to 1984.

This forcefully conveys the character of the television environment because it signals the nature of its progression in the twenty year period. Channel proliferation has seemingly created a more acute need for mainstream outlets to compete as the last bastions of a mass market, whereby all have displayed a readiness to embrace programme types that are designed to secure ratings, preferably at low cost. The market forces that envelope the system have impelled broadcasters towards profitable genres and consequently away from public service programming. The reconfigurations of structure and policy that have characterised the last twenty years have thus translated into extensive changes within the output patterns of the channels. It is abundantly clear that a different set of genres predominate as compared to the regulated system examined and it is these which encapsulate the essence of television's evolution by confirming the aim of replacing informative programming with entertainment in many cases.

The digital channels selected demonstrate this trend clearly with only 146 hours 45 minutes public service provision in total, an amount less than half that of either of the terrestrial systems examined, most of which was on BBC4. Figure 7.14 illustrates that E4 and ITV2 had no such programming whatsoever, a finding that was not unexpected given the tendencies highlighted earlier. Sky1 broadcast a mere 19 hours, all of which were coded as documentary, although whether these could be legitimately classified as informed programming needs emphasising. BBC3 was quite similar with 18 hours of such output, distributed across news (11 hours), documentary (4 hours) and drama (3 hours). It was the regular news bulletin that opened up the

channel's evening service that formed the bulk of its total, as other instances of public service broadcasting were confined to one-off appearances.

Figure 7.14 - Public Service Provision: Digital Television



Source: Author's Own Research

BBC4 accounted for the vast majority of the digital channel's public service output, with a colossal 109 hours 45 minutes in accordance with its remit as 'a place to think' as shown in figure 7.14. It showed 57 hours 25 minutes of documentary programming, augmented by 18 hours 40 minutes of classical music, 18 hours 5 minutes of the arts and a regular news slot at 7.00pm that added up to 11 hours. Many of its other programmes types, such as discussion and events could be legitimately conceived as public service, particularly for the manner in which they had been covered. However, for the sake of consistency these were not included in the calculations. Nevertheless, BBC4 was the only digital channel that expressed a full commitment to public service broadcasting, possibly to make up for the short-fall elsewhere. However, with an audience size of only 0.2% within the total audience (BBC, 2005:138) it is clear that the channel will struggle to make an impact.

The analysis has exposed that the digital channels have very little interest in the maxim of public service broadcasting apart from BBC4, which appears to be the primary site for its provision as its schedule is made up by a disproportionately high amount of the genres. It seems that BBC4 is becoming the location for where serious programming is aired, a trait that historically had been associated with BBC2, but which has recently adopted lighter genres. In fact, many of the documentaries on BBC2 were derived from its digital stable mate with the Corporation 'showcasing' its digital fare on the terrestrial channel under the banner of 'BBC4 ON BBC2'. Competition on the mainstream channels has evidently squeezed out serious programming and it appears that a digital off-shoot offers a convenient solution for where it can be housed. *Thus, public service broadcasting has itself become a themed niche rather than being spread out over the whole system, a feature which runs counter to its very ethos.*

Collectively, the data convey how public service is adjusting to the realities of changed conditions by being confined to a single location while outlets on which it was traditionally provided have focused heavily on ratings winners. The danger of this tendency is that BBC4 is in the process of becoming a cultural ghetto for public service broadcasting within the digital system, and more dangerously, for the BBC itself as it exudes competitive tendencies on all of its other channels. The natural home on a high brow channel is worrying because its marginal presence in a multichannel environment surrounded by hundreds of rivals makes it easier to avoid. This illustrates the impact of competition because it conveys how increasing the number of channels adversely alters the ratio of serious programming as well as the character of its availability. The digital additions, apart from BBC4, mean very little for public service broadcasting as it is being stuck in a little corner of the system from where its influence is likely to be minimal because the overarching framework is structured around entertainment values.

Yet the future for public service is paradoxically tied to market forces because its continued existence is contingent upon how effectively the channel on which it is located performs in the market place. The manner in which the Corporation responds to these developments will govern the future existence of a philosophy that has changed in relative amount and profile into becoming a marginal element of the

broadcasting environment, rather than one of its defining features. This could correlate with a changing perception concerning the purposes of programming and the wider role of broadcasting in society because of the business considerations which dictate the behaviour of media institutions. While this needs further investigation, it is clear that public service broadcasting is entering into a new phase, and that its core principle of universalism is already being eroded because availability of serious programming depends largely upon how effectively BBC4 competes against the multitude of channels who are offering very different types of content.

Other Findings

A close scrutiny of the main findings in Tables 7.3 to 7.5 reveals some other interesting findings that the analysis uncovered. Comment programmes, whilst not widespread in 1984, did feature in the listings enough to warrant their classification as a genre within their own right. BBC1 had *Points of View*, as it does now, but also *Hotline*, a weekly 50 minute programme that was intended to function as a televisual personal column. This 3 hours 15 minutes worked out as 1.6% of its airtime and was augmented by 45 minutes (0.3%) of *A Moment to Talk* on BBC2, a show which allowed individuals the opportunity to directly express their views on a topical issue. While ITV did not have any of these programmes, Channel 4 devoted 4 hours 40 minutes (2.2%) of its entire service to this genre, comprised mainly of a short 10 minute comment after the daily evening news and the half hour *Right to Reply* every Friday night. Overall, comment programmes formed 8 hours 40 minutes (1%) of the entire 1984 schedule.

There were no such programmes in 2004 other than *Points of View*, whose total contribution was negligible. It would appear that the interactive nature of recent technological developments may explain why television has distanced itself from this genre completely. The return line digital technology brings to the medium could be seen as a method of infusing a comment facility onto every programme. As viewers can respond to programme makers via email or through posting their views within chat rooms and on bulletin boards, the need for a separate genre to comment has clearly come to be seen as unnecessary in the sense that a feed back facility has been

potentially grafted onto all programmes. This reliance on certain innovations underscores the need for technical proficiency to increase amongst all viewers, because those unable to use the technology for such purposes will be unable to air their opinions given that broadcasters are not using any other means with which to capture viewer response.

Other programme types on the terrestrial system have also dropped in the 20 year period. Arts programming fell proportionately by 2% from 25 hours 20 minutes to 10 hours 30 minutes, a total loss of 14 hours 50 minutes. There was a 1.3% relative drop in current affairs from 23 hours to 15 hours 25 minutes, a loss of 7 hours 35 minutes. Both instances reflect not just a proportionate decline, but an actual reduction in the forms of output to again signal that the four channels of 1984 outperformed their five terrestrial counterparts of 2004. In regards to the latter, Barnett's (2005:9) study found that current affairs provision has halved in recent years and is presently at its lowest level at any time since 1955. The identifiable trend in operation is that terrestrial television has reduced its transmission of serious genres whilst increasing its allocation of entertainment to the extent that less airtime is given over to what had been staple components of the schedule in a different era.

My analysis also revealed that there were small but significant drops in the relative proportions of film (2.2%), popular music (1.5%), situation comedies (1.6%), classical music (2.1%) and children's programmes (1.3%) across terrestrial television in the period under observation. This has occurred partly because there are now more genres to cover, so the comparable amount of airtime has had to be divided between more categories. In all of these cases, such programme types have become themed on digital channels dedicated to their provision alone, or form substantial parts of channels devoted to those kinds of genre. For instance, there is a gamut of children's, film and popular music channels within the digital system. Similarly, there are numerous news channels that cater for current affairs, while arts and classical music form the bulwark of BBC4's schedule. Meanwhile, situation comedies feature heavily on the digital entertainment channels where they have come to occupy a permanent slot at peak time virtually every day.

Therefore, the terrestrial system has reduced its provision in a number of areas, although there is quantitatively more of most programme types purely because of the sheer volume of channels that populate digital television. There has been a marked decline towards certain genres on terrestrial television because broadcasters are starting to theme their digital channels in accordance with certain classifications, rendering the overall mix of terrestrial television as less concentrated in a number of areas. Importantly, some of the primetime content that features on the digital channels is premium fare. The terrestrial only viewer loses out as the basic service received is reflective of how broadcasters are spreading their television operations across a suite of digital channels, whereby some high profile shows will be aired on the digital off-shoots as a clear tactic of inciting viewers into getting the extra channels. This approach is being used quite possibly to make up for the limitations the digital channels have in being comprised chiefly of imports and/or repeats, as it ensures that these outlets will have a little original appeal.

The one area where thematic replacement on digital has not offset terrestrial decline is in regards to religious programming. The 12 hours 45 minutes (1.5%) of such output in 1984 had fallen 9 hours 25 minutes (or 1.2%) to a mere 3 hours 20 minutes across the 5 terrestrial channels of 2004. BBC1 remains the main religious broadcaster, although its 4 hours 25 minutes of 1984 had dropped 0.8% to 2 hours 50 minutes. BBC2's coverage dwindled from 2 hours 30 minutes in 1984 to nothing, while ITV's 2 hours 45 minutes had similarly evaporated, as has the 3 hours 5 minutes on Channel 4. Five exacerbated this trend as it broadcast no religious output and none could be found on the digital channels either. In fact, BBC1's *Songs of Praise* was the only regular religious programme across the whole of terrestrial television in 2004, with the other programmes that appeared being one-off. Such findings are consistent with OFCOM's (2004b:11) research which indicated that in 2003, the amount of religion fell to its lowest level since 1998 as it formed under 7 hours per week, with just over 1 hour per week in peak time.

This illustrates that despite a massive increase in the available airtime, a relatively economical and, for some, important genre has virtually disappeared from the terrestrial schedules, while the main digital channels have contributed nothing in this regard. At the time of writing, ITV has just received permission from OFCOM to

cut its provision further still (Brown, 2005:10). This is notable as the channel broadcast only a single half hour programme in the time frame of this study. The decline in both absolute and relative terms forcefully conveys the effect of deregulation through demonstrating the ascendancy of competitive forces and their impact on the totality of the schedules by revealing what happens to an unprofitable genre even though it has a committed audience. Religious programming seemingly does not fit into the current television philosophy and could disappear altogether because broadcasters see no profit in it.

The findings underscore the need to retain some form of regulation by highlighting the virtual elimination of certain types of programmes in a deregulated market. Without directives stipulating the need for particular types of content, television has moved away from output of little financial return to an over abundance of those which are successful. This exposes the underlying economics of the present television system because it illuminates clearly the operations of the ratings driven environment and the need to keep costs low. It is apparent that the competitive ethos at the nucleus of television is placing more pressure on broadcasters to squeeze out certain genres and replace them with a glut of the same programme type. OFCOM's (2004b:15) research supports this view because it found substantial losses in education and current affairs, a reduction in first-run origination, a move towards a populist approach in certain genres, and a marginalisation of minority interests such as arts, classical music and religion. The 'free market' in television engenders a set of consequences which are derived from the defining structures of the system and which filter into the distribution of genres, the timings within the schedule and sometimes into the form of content.

Variety shows constitute another genre that has disappeared altogether. In 1984 they formed a significant 2% of the entire output, totalling 17 hours 10 minutes. Most of this was concentrated on the main channels with 9 hours 25 minutes on BBC1 and 5 hours on ITV. Importantly, these programmes acted as a corner stone of prime time, with *The Paul Daniels Magic Show* and *The Noel Edmonds Late, Late Breakfast Show* airing during BBC1's Saturday evenings, and *The 6 O' Clock Show* on Friday nights on ITV. Their total removal from the schedules illuminates a radical shift in the mind-set towards mainstream entertainment as broadcasters rely almost

unilaterally on reality TV, lifestyle and fictional series in prime time slots owing to their proven ratings ability.

As expected, an array of new genres has surfaced in the twenty year period other than those already exposed. Programmes that I classified with the labels 'travel', 'discussion' and 'events' featured significantly on the digital channels more than the terrestrial system in 2004. These did not form programme categories in their own right in 1984, instead being confined to the novelty of one-off appearances. It is clear that broadcasting institutions have developed a range of distinct programme types by unearthing more genres through extending upon certain topics into classifications within their own right. While these categories only occupy a small segment of the digital schedules, they do at first suggest that one defining aspect of change is the emergence of narrower interests. It would appear that the thematic nature of digital television has ensured a greater variety of subject-matter can be covered by catering for specialist communities so that issues can be probed in greater depth than that which the limited system of 1984 permitted.

However, it would not be fair to claim that such patterns are illustrative of a greater degree of overall diversity and choice. This is because the emergence of narrower interests occurs at the same time of a more general movement towards mainstream genres whose ability to secure ratings is tried and tested. The increase in genres does not equal the proliferation in channels as the new outlets are, in the main, multiplying the provision of successful programme types. So, while there are more genres than in 1984, these are not provided in equal measure. In most cases, such new programme types were confined to late night slots upon the digital channels to show that sectional interests are not exactly the purpose of the new television system because of its orientation towards the mainstream.

Other interesting features of the current television system were observed by the analysis. While spin-off programmes were coded under the same genre of the shows that they were derivatives of, I did nevertheless work out how much time they amounted to in their own right. On BBC3, the *EastEnders Revealed* series formed 3 hours 30 minutes (2.3%) of the channel's entire output. ITV2 had spin-offs of the parent channels most successful programmes to include *Coronation Street*, *The Block*

and *The X Factor*. Together these totalled 20 hours 45 minutes (7.3%) of ITV2's schedule. A major tendency of current television practise then is to generate spill-overs of a successful programme, indicative of how broadcasters are seeking to exploit the full commercial value it holds. So, flag-ship programmes are being used to attract audiences to the digital off-shoots where derivatives of the main channel are aired. The digital channels are thus closely related to their parent channels in terms of the programmes they broadcast, allowing viewers the opportunity to follow up on central characters or other aspects of the main show.

This reveals how broadcasters are attempting to reinvoke a successful programme by generating additions closely related to it, which they then exploit for all the potential worth. The derived programmes constitute a core element of the digital off-shoots by appealing to devoted fans of the main show and are clearly being used to incite such audiences towards adopting digital television. Sometimes, this tendency worked the other way round, as original material of successful programmes was broadcast first on the digital equivalents in order to tempt viewers into taking digital television, particularly through the popular series on the entertainment channels. The digital system has become the arena in which the main channels stretch out their hits as the broadcasting life of a show extends beyond its original transmission through repeats and derivatives that seek to utilise its popularity to the full. All of this reveals the manner in which broadcasters have to carefully consider how best to utilise premium content across a number of outlets that differ in their availability to viewers.

Overview

This chapter has empirically clarified how television has evolved over a 20 year period in terms of its content ratios by constructing a thorough typology that exposes the output patterns which define the time frame. I have examined the overall character of the broadcasting environment by quantifying the programming profiles of the constituent channels from where it has been possible to verify the range of output that forms each system and the complete results are conveyed in the genre tables that follow. The analysis has revealed a series of contrasts between the terrestrial systems

of 1984 and 2004, as well as highlighting salient features of the main digital channels. The data provide an insight into the direction television has developed and the likely route of its immediate progression by detailing how a more deregulated industry functions in relation to programming, where finance for output has to be spread more thinly across a greater number of channels. These patterns are visibly conveyed within tables 7.3 to 7.5, where the full findings of the content study are displayed.

Tables 7.3 to 7.5 illustrate the overall findings of the content study. I found substantial differences in the programming patterns of terrestrial television by uncovering a number of areas in which decline has been manifest. This centred around serious genres including drama, documentary and religion, while the coverage of sport too had heavily fallen. A chief finding is that not only do the *ratios* of particular genres fall in the competitive conditions of the present time, but that occasionally there are *actual* reductions, whereby increasing outlets and transmission hours has in fact had an adverse effect on the airtime of certain categories. That this has occurred when other genres of entertainment orientation have proliferated indicates a clear sense of the logic that pervades the industry. Indeed, the categories of reality TV, lifestyle and fictional series have all grown markedly and have come to inhabit regular positions within peak viewing. This simple act of replacement is indicative of an economic mind-set at the heart of the scheduling process where the impulse of ratings has come to shape the distribution of genres.

Table 7.3: Overall 1984 Data

Genre	BBC1	BBC2	ITV	Channel 4	Overall
Current Affairs	1	2.2	2.5	5.3	2.8
Film	17.1	14.2	7.4	21	14.9
Variety Shows	4.5	0	2.4	1.3	2
Fictional Series	7.3	5.4	23.1	10	11.5
Popular Music	3	1.1	0.2	3.4	1.9
Documentaries and Educational	9.2	18.3	4.5	14.1	11.5
Lifestyle	0	1.4	1	0.5	0.7
Comment	1.6	0.3	0	2.2	1
Sport	4	20.2	5.4	7.3	9.2
Drama	7.2	5.6	9.4	2.4	6.2
Situation Comedy	9	2.5	5.1	8.4	6.3
Other Comedy	1.2	4	2.4	0	1.9
Classical Music	1.6	6.9	0	2.2	2.7
Quiz and Game Shows	5	0.2	13.8	1	5
Arts	0	2.5	1	8.6	3
Religion	2.1	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.5
Children's	6.3	0.1	3	0.3	2.5
News	16.4	10.7	13.3	7.7	12
Nostalgia	1.4	0.7	0	1.4	0.9
Celebrity Chat Shows	1.9	0	3.3	0	1.3
Others	0.2	2.5	0.9	1.4	1.2

Source: Author's Own Research

Table 7.4: Overall Data for 2004 Terrestrial Television

Genre	BBC1	BBC2	ITV	Channel 4	Five	Overall
Current Affairs	2.8	1.2	2.4	1	0	1.5
Film	9.7	10	6.1	14.1	23.7	12.7
Docusoaps	1	3.6	0	1.1	0	1.1
Fictional Series	17.3	0	30	19.4	20.4	17.4
Popular Music	1.4	0	0.5	0	0	0.4
Documentaries and Educational	4.5	14.7	3.1	12	15.1	9.9
Lifestyle	4.4	16.1	10	11	4.2	9.1
Celebrity News	1	0	1.2	0	2	0.8
Sport	2.7	11	4.5	0.2	3.8	4.4
Drama	1.2	5.3	8.6	1	0	3.2
Situation Comedy	6	6.5	0	10.5	0	4.7
Other Comedy	1.4	3.3	2.4	2	0.9	2
Classical Music	1.1	1.7	0	0	0	0.6
Quiz and Game Shows	7.5	12.6	3.4	0	0	4.8
Arts	0.4	1.9	1.2	1	0.5	1
Religion	1.3	0	0.2	0	0	0.3
Children's	6.1	0	0	0	0	1.2
News	19.2	8.2	18.4	10.6	11	13.4
Nostalgia	1	0.5	0.5	0	3.3	1
Celebrity Chat Shows	1.9	0	2.7	9	0	2.7
Reality TV	2.6	1.4	3.4	4.2	10.6	4.5
Real Life Crime	3.8	0.8	0	0.4	0.4	1.1
The Bizarre	-	-	-	2	2.8	1
Others	1.7	1.2	1.4	0.5	1.3	1.2

Source: Author's Own Research

Table 7.5: Overall Data for 2004 Digital Television

Genre	BBC3	BBC4	ITV2	E4	Sky 1	Overall
Sit-coms	10.2	1	1.4	28.3	23.6	13.8
Fictional Series	11.7	-	11	33.7	38.1	20.6
Reality TV	3.7	-	23.5	29.9	5.2	13.9
Other Comedy	0.7	0.9	2.6	4.1	4.3	2.7
Film	13.2	13.2	22.3	3.9	7.2	11.8
Pop Music	-	-	3.3	0.1	-	0.8
Sport and Fitness	4.5	-	7.9	-	0.5	2.6
Real-Life Crime	-	-	2.5	-	1.9	1
Quiz and Game Shows	-	-	2.7	-	-	0.6
Celebrity Chat Shows	4	-	2	-	1	1.3
Talk Shows	-	-	11.2	-	-	2.5
Docusoaps	10.7	-	2.4	-	2.4	2.8
Drama	2	3	-	-	-	0.8
Lifestyle	23.3	-	-	-	1.9	4.2
News	7.3	7.3	-	-	-	2.4
Discussion	-	5.6	-	-	-	0.9
Arts	-	12	-	-	-	1.9
Classical Music	-	12.4	-	-	-	2
Events	-	3.3	-	-	-	0.5
Travel	-	3.1	-	-	1.4	0.8
Documentary	2.7	38.2	-	-	9	8.7
Celebrity News	5	-	0.5	-	-	0.9
The Bizarre	1	-	5.4	-	2.9	2.1
Others	-	-	1.3	-	0.6	0.4

Source: Author's Own Research

The data suggest that a regulated television system of finite airtime has a greater commitment to informed programming in comparison to a system that is less constrained by restrictions of time but is bound more by the incentive to capture audiences. Collectively, the data emphasise considerable contractions in those genres that are emblematic of public service broadcasting and in doing so symbolises a philosophical shift in the objectives of programming as virtually all channels increasingly embrace certain kinds of entertainment. There is still a division between private and public broadcasters in 2004 according to these statistics, particularly amongst the digital channels. However, both the profile and the commitment to public service have radically altered as the television system focuses largely on content designed to win audiences while the created niche of BBC4 has been established to serve the social purposes that were once the objectives of the whole system. While public channels are broadcasting slightly higher levels of serious programming than the commercial stations, the totality of their output is less distinguishable and is very different to what it was in 1984. Channel 4 and BBC2 in particular have become more competitive by embracing lighter genres and moving away from others that previously defined their identity.

These same processes have led to the evolution of new kinds of factual programmes that have been constructed as ratings hits. Such output signals a stylistic shift in the form of the documentary genre, an outcome that again illustrates the impact of market forces. Indeed, there is a greater degree of hybridity within the schedules now as new sorts of programmes have emerged from the fusion of previously distinct categories. I found it difficult to group some of the 2004 material because it was not always clear how it should be classified. This is indicative of the manner in which television has progressed because it shows distinct styles and subject-matter have arisen. Many of these categories were established by slightly altering traditional genres or by merging others. These practises provide an insight into how the needs of the schedule have created an urgency to unearth the next 'killer' format to act as the 'water cooler' moment in the light of audience fragmentation.

In summary, the schedules of 1984 revealed a far more eclectic mix within prime time where a greater variety of genres would be aired. The same slot in 2004 has been filled with programmes from a smaller coterie of categories to represent a far more segmented regime as timing and genre are closely tied together in accurately defined blocks. There is specific evidence within peak viewing of what Ellis (2000:140) calls 'generic imbalance' because of the proven success of certain programmes. Such a precise dissection of the schedule is indicative of a degree of homogenisation in the assemblage of programming with the transmission of popular content reflecting the need to control what has become the chief battleground of broadcasting. These findings resonate with Burton's (2000:56) observation of a more competitive edge to scheduling through the need to secure consistent patterns in viewing. In this way films, fictional series, reality TV, lifestyle and situation comedies give the current terrestrial system the feel of themed entertainment outlets at prime time. Moreover, a reliance on such output in this spot has consequently led to a slippage of serious fare including current affairs, news and documentary to be placed later in the schedule, usually at around 11pm on most terrestrial channels.

The patterns which typify the operational behaviour of terrestrial television have intensified on the digital channels to illustrate a completely different sort of broadcasting service. The study demonstrated a heavy utilisation of imports and/or repeats of a few genres on the private outlets all of the time. The channels I examined exhibited a thorough commitment to a few hit shows that were relied upon extensively as the main output type. The practise of theming digital channels seems to have been done in accordance with programme more so than genre alone. Gardham's (2001:124) point that new channels huddle around the familiarity of the old or limit themselves to a single repeatable proposition is particularly relevant in capturing the dynamic of the private digital channels that I examined. The net effect of increasing the number of outlets is to pump out the same things repeatedly, signalling an overabundance of some genres at the same time as an avoidance of others.

There is still however some evidence that the digital channels have added to the programming diet of television, particularly those of the BBC, because a few new categories have emerged which are indicative of the specialist nature of provision. While there are evidently more genres, some of which have been extremely popular

with audiences, the tendency to replicate these excessively has also become apparent. The vast majority of digital output is arranged around a small number of hits so that the only genres consistently well proportioned are those of a discernable entertainment persuasion. Hence, the contribution of digital television lies in its ability to generate space for already profitable genres as the degree of choice it instils functions largely within prescribed parameters. This *managed* choice symbolises a concerted spurt of the over familiar that characterises digital television, but which can be detected on the terrestrial system also. Digital television is therefore pumping out a lot more of certain things, a bit more of some things and very little of other things.

It would seem from this that diversity and competition are not commensurate because the need for profit has pushed broadcasters into allocating their resources towards those formats which are cheap and/or have a proven ability to capture audiences. Very little material within the digital system is first-run and that which is often happens to be a hit show of a heavily covered genre. In sum, the logic of market forces can be detected through the transitions within the programming ratios, by the new types of programmes that have emerged and by the dependency on ratings winners. These findings illustrate how a regulated system will gravitate towards certain genres more effectively than one in which controls have been lessened, even though there is far more airtime and outlets available. For this reason, the terrestrial system of 2004 proves to be significantly less devoted to certain programmes as compared to that of 1984, while the digital channels exhibit a completely different set of priorities altogether.

The analysis demonstrates clearly that broadcasting cannot be insulated from commercial pressures because all channels show tendencies towards particular sorts of output. The need to achieve quantitative results has thus created definite consequences in the types of content broadcast. It is difficult for innovation to thrive in this framework because there are inexorable movements towards the proven and away from experimentation. Barnett (2005:9) concludes his study with the sentiment that there has been a reduction in creative ambition over time and a greater uniformity within each genre, and he attributes this to the greater degree of risk aversion television executives are likely to now have. I would endorse this view because television as a business does not function as an on-demand model of programme

provision. Rather than the interaction of individual wants and creative expertise, the schedules have been meticulously arranged around specific successes set in scope by previous practise. This means that instead of shifting the balance of power towards the audience, the programming diet has been configured according to imperatives dictated by broadcasters in line with the environment they have to function within. As the closest approximation to a 'free market', the digital channels prove that in such circumstances the acute need for well established programming formulas supersedes the desire for the adventurous.

Overall, the findings of this chapter confirm that some form of regulation is required because systematically, competition pushes television towards the replication of certain programme categories and away from others such that the overall output balance leans heavily towards certain kinds of entertainment. Without intervention there will be a further glut of lighter genres and less informed programming, along with a greater marginalization in the schedule. Much of the serious output is aired only because regulation demands it, as the commercial environment has evidently less interest in some of the sorts of genres that were provided under a regulated system. If such measures are relaxed, the same processes will accentuate further and viewers may find that the only way to obtain serious programming is if they subscribe to it. For instance, the development of Channel 4 indicates how serious programming has been dropped by an outlet that had historically been set up to provide it, leaving specialist channels as the main provider of informative content. The nature of these changes therefore illuminates an important general movement in the operations of the television system where the ability to pay is increasingly likely to be the chief means of availability. Similarly, I also feel that the data highlight a difference in the way television is being defined because its business logic dictates how the medium functions as opposed to the social purposes that were previously etched centrally into its whole framework.

This study has illuminated the effect of structural and philosophical change in broadcasting by setting the current television system against that of 1984. The data generated relates to a particular historical moment and set of processes which characterise the intervening period and should be read as a method of quantifying the consequences of the forces that have taken root. The major factors in operation are

those associated with competition and its impact is visible everywhere in the schedules of 2004. From the composition of channels, to the occupation of particular types of programme within prime time and even to the germination of certain genres themselves, it is clear how the need to capture audience has dominated the art of scheduling. Corner's (1995:34) point that anxieties about the negative consequences of television can be traced through to the organisation of the industry and degree of regulation is an extremely pertinent place to concur. Although programming requirements have been lifted in the period under observation it is evident that the market instils its own kind of controls and the effect of these can be deemed to be unhealthy on the degree of mix within the schedules. In short, the increase in channels has not led to more diversity.

Chapter 8: Conclusion – A Collision of Philosophies

The purpose of this thesis has been to illuminate precisely what digital television is, how it has come about and the range of issues involved in the transition to a broadcasting system in which it becomes the mode of transmission. In doing so, I have argued how important a development it is, not just for the technological advancement that it represents, but also for a full range of issues that it gives rise to and a related set of associated changes that together transform elements of the medium. The project has conveyed clearly why digital television has been embraced by Government and industry because both see distinct opportunities from the potential it holds. Through acknowledging this, it has been possible to see how the industrial and regulatory settings of broadcasting are currently undergoing a high degree of reconfiguration in order to derive optimum advantages from the circumstances that are unfolding. Thus, the institutional structures of the communications media are adjusting to incorporate unique formations of commercial enterprise from which new consumer expectations have taken root. In sum, there is a simultaneous duality of excitement and unsettlement that permeates the field of communications as the new media landscape takes shape. It is within this evolving system that corporate actors are attempting to find a place for themselves while political authorities seek to direct the broad contours towards certain ends.

I have demonstrated the range of implications digital television engenders through investigating how it affects particular parts of the communications terrain by underpinning my research on three questions. I have therefore offered a formula of analysis that covers technology, policy and programming in the attempt to observe key issues of information flow, structure and form that together illuminate different aspects of change. The project has also benefited greatly from the historical perspective because it has displayed how the development fits into a matrix of long-

standing issues that have characterised television's life-cycle. From this position it is noticeable that there are a series of continuities in terms of the themes television has been organised around, but also a number of breaks as the innovation has led to the formation of different questions that have emerged in response to the emerging conditions. Digitalisation has thus generated a complete array of critical themes because of the distinct properties that define it, the manner in which its structural parameters have been arranged and the effect of these towards established questions that have featured in television's history.

However, the thesis advances that digital television needs to be regarded not as an example of technological determinism in the sense that it is causing social change of its own accord. This is because there is nothing inevitable about the way it has been organised or the shape that it has come to assume. Rather, the scope of activity has been fixed by political and corporate actors who have designed it around particular objectives which they feel it should serve. From this established framework the technological capabilities of the innovation are then drawn and applied. So, digitalisation needs to be seen as a core element of wider non-technological processes within society of which it has become an integral component and from where any social influence it has can be subsequently exerted. Working from this angle of inquiry has made it possible to unravel the political and economic dynamic imbued within the technology because it has exposed how the new television has been defined and managed instead of regarding its arrival as autonomous and impact as inexorable. This perspective has highlighted the actors involved within its diffusion and the objectives they have set out for it, from where it will ultimately be possible to assess how successful they have been.

By doing so I have made an original contribution to the field by revealing salient features of the new television system and the range of issues involved in the transition. I have adopted a similar approach to Collins (1990) and O'Malley (1994), both of whom investigated earlier instances of technological change in broadcasting, with a focus on policy and institutional matters. These studies reveal how a new technology is adopted and diffused along with the imperatives behind it, and my project was defined by a similar scope. My work has also sought to build on early studies of digital television, such as Steemers (1998a) and Jensen and Toscan (1999),

as well as others who partially considered it, such as Goodwin (1998) and Holland (2000). While these authors have thought about the importance of this innovation, I have been able to offer direct evidence on how some of their ideas have panned out over time. The thesis has developed the formative work on the subject by providing a sustained analysis of the technology, policy and programming aspects of digital television and should be read as a major critical inquiry into the topic for that reason.

While I have attempted to reach definite conclusions, the nature of this topic means that many of the concerns I have detailed are on-going and will not be resolved for some time. My intention has been to uncover the major issues involved in the formative stages of the digitalisation of television, before outlining their relative importance, particularly as the manner of progression and ultimate shape of the medium depends heavily upon how these matters are being handled in the present. Thus, I have sought to detail the themes which will figure as major technological, political, business and civic issues over the next few years in the transition to a full digital broadcasting system. In doing so, I am hoping to initiate debate on the preliminary concerns and also provide future research with some ideas on how to proceed in studying this phenomenon.

Main Findings

In response to the three research questions that have guided this study, *technologically* digital television represents a major advance because it overhauls the simplicities of analogue television. The change in the processing of broadcasting signals accompanies a whole host of transformations that alter a number of areas of the medium and increase its profile as a means of communication. The need for new kinds of equipment gives rise to a number of advantages that potentially endow audiences with more control over the viewing experience and a wide range of extra services that symbolise how television amounts to more than just the broadcasting of programmes. Furthermore, the complete new technological environment digital television is a part of creates potential hybridity with other media as all share a common infrastructure. Thus, in its digital incarnation television has been advanced to

encompass a range of possibilities and functions that were unimaginable in its analogue phase.

Despite this, I do not think it is viable to rework existing definitions of television or to conceive of this progression as a totally separate proposition as yet. The medium as is commonly understood still exists, even in a new technological form, because all of the extensions work from the same predetermined idea of what television is. Any sense of change then operates within defined boundaries of what the medium entails and what it can do even though some of these have transformative potential. Digitalisation is therefore another developmental stage within the medium's evolution as the advantages it adds can be accommodated within existing definitions of the object. Also, regarding digital television as a distinct entity depends heavily on a very different type of usage whereby consumption habits would have to be overhauled. A paradigmatic reworking may one day be necessary in order to capture the nuances the medium will then possess, but in the meantime, we can hold on to prior notions of what television is but to which we should add certain functions that encapsulate the precise nature of change.

In regards to *policy*, the plans for digital television have taken direction from New Labour's wider political project of seeking to harness the potential of the information technology landscape in order to derive an array of economic and cultural benefits. The belief in the power of digital media has created an urgency towards building an information society in which communications technologies have an increased applicability to everyday tasks and a pronounced importance towards the material wealth of the nation. This has led to the identification of digital television as a core component of the new order, symbolic of the ensuing shifts but also a prime contributor towards them. The general political plans have dictated that digital television be organised in a certain shape from which the economic and cultural tasks bestowed upon the wider communications sector can be fulfilled. Therefore, digital television has a number of core industrial and social duties ascribed to it so that it can assist individuals in routine tasks as well as buttressing Britain's economic standing.

The general theme of change has necessitated the design of a new regulatory regime to deal with different circumstances and priorities. The recently inaugurated

OFCOM is reflective of a supervisory body more in tune with prevailing logic, particularly as its unified shape and the manner in which its operating framework have been established to enshrine both sets of objectives mirror the general approach towards communications media. It is clear that the political hopes invested within digital television are in themselves creating further policy imperatives such as the project of switchover in the attempt to bring about a full-scale digital system of communication, which is a prerequisite towards the realisation of an information society. Thus, policy has had to act and react to technological changes so as to ensure the defined potential of the innovation can be extracted.

Given that the objectives for digital television have been set in motion by the wider plans of using information technology to bolster economic performance whilst furthering the applicability for individuals towards routine activities, these goals have been woven into the legislation as pillars around which television's framework has been formulated. Deregulation has thus become the main theme running through principal legislation like the 2003 Communications Act because of the constructed need to further industrial ends. Thus, ownership controls have been relaxed while foreign companies are now permitted to buy into British television. At the same time, cultural purposes have been pinpointed too because there are attempts to use digital television as a democratic tool in the creation of a more active civic body. There are also certain qualifications on structural enlargement and a rhetorical commitment to public service broadcasting in the attempt to balance both sets of aims.

New Labour's television policy has therefore attempted to reconcile the traditional dichotomy between State intervention and market forces by designing a framework in which both co-exist as the interests they represent are safeguarded. However, the fact that deregulation has been the main thrust behind change while the shape of public service broadcasting is still being formulated provides clear indication that the communications system is being organised to suit commercial interests. The current broadcasting landscape therefore can be summed up as a collision of philosophies in the sense that the general trend of deregulating the industry and unleashing market forces has been moderated through an understanding that these impulses may run counter to the social functions of television. So, while the Government has initiated an approach towards television where the long-standing

goals of the market and the State have been brought together in the form of a compromise, it is evident that liberalisation is the chief goal. Indeed, the ruminations on public service have lagged behind the deregulatory processes so that industrial priorities mark out the foundations of the emerging technological terrain, while social purposes are still being devised. This conveys the general purpose of the broadcasting structure which has been enunciated.

The Government has constructed the need for change at the same time as reworking the framework of broadcasting towards market objectives. It has initiated a new approach whilst attempting to retain the 'good' elements of the old system that centred on the technology's social aims. Yet in many ways, Labour has failed to deal with the contradictions in its overall policy by attempting to balance too many irreconcilable objectives. For instance, the aim of furthering the interests of domestic industry has been stressed at the same time as the relaxation of ownership controls that allow foreign players into British broadcasting. It is not clear how such measures further the economic or social purposes that have been declared because the consequences are likely to centre on large, international conglomerates taking over parts of British television. Therefore, the advancement of a free market, along with protectionist policies on programme requirements and a BBC of central importance to the overall switchover project do not all sit comfortably together within the emerging digital landscape because they reveal contradictory thinking on the part of the Government. The collision of old and new ideas that the general policy represents denotes a confused framework that may struggle to negotiate all of the issues involved within the transition to digital television and could lead to a loss of some of the advantages that have been traditionally associated with British broadcasting.

Furthermore, the ideological parameters around which the digital television system has been based will struggle to represent fully the duality of purposes that have been set out for it. A social market in broadcasting will necessarily be heavily skewed towards the commercial objectives that underpin it because the very *structures* of such a framework impact on the way programming decisions are made and how resources are allocated. Economic concerns, such as competition and audience maximization are becoming the central considerations upon which digital television is being diffused. It is highly likely then that the medium will be unable to

achieve cultural purposes to any significant degree because financial concerns will dictate the extent to which such goals can be pursued.

These trends have been captured by the *programming* patterns which define the current television system, including all of the terrestrial channels and the main digital channels. It is clear that competitive tendencies have altered the content patterns of terrestrial television. The study indicated that there is a far greater relative preponderance of lighter genres now in comparison to the pre-digital era. While the genres of lifestyle, reality TV and fictional series occupy prime time slots almost unilaterally and are fulcrums of the schedule, more serious and traditionally central genres such as drama, documentary and religion have declined in total airtime and have been shifted towards late night positions in many cases. Furthermore, there has been a corresponding decline in public service broadcasting as the terrestrial system of 2004 devoted far less proportionate and actual airtime towards its genres in comparison to 1984. This is illustrative of the competitive pressures that frame current television practise and which have had direct results in the composition of the schedule. Moreover, new genres have emerged, many of which exhibit a reworking of factual programming to cover lighter issues as compared to the documentary tradition, all of which collectively illustrate the impact of competition on television output.

The digital channels have exacerbated these trends because the same light genres are provided for in abundance, even if this means constantly repeating the same programmes. Similarly, serious genres have very little presence at all as entertainment becomes the major function of these outlets. Only BBC4 differs in its programming policy, illustrated by the manner in which it has become the niche for serious content amidst the whole system. The findings confirm that public service broadcasting has been reworked to differ in character and amount so that the television framework is geared towards the ends of entertainment above all others. This indicates clearly that digitalisation has been seized upon because of its commercial potential and the fact that it can be employed to further industrial priorities. Such consequences can be detected by the manner in which the total broadcasting environment functions in its search for ratings as proven by the related shifts in programming ratios. The character of television has thus changed in response to the established conditions that leave little space for output of less financial return.

This is a serious situation because it suggests the logic within television is leaving less space for public service broadcasting, which then has to be rethought to fit commercial imperatives. Dahlgren (2000b:32) takes this up when stressing that the task must be to regenerate a public service broadcasting vision under new societal circumstances and within a new media landscape. This is what seems to be happening within the corridors of OFCOM, as an on going set of papers try to establish what it is and other basic elements that would allow it to exist within a digital environment. However, as commercial imperatives have already laid out a strict framework for the operations of the media and have had effects on the programming balance it seems that the priorities have already been established. It appears that public service broadcasting is a philosophy that runs counter to the climate within the shifting television system because the structural parameters have been fixed in scope around commercial goals. The theme that typifies television's current state is a certain type of change, and it is the nature of this that must be acknowledged when thinking through further developments within a communications system whose underlying character is now market driven.

Theory

With all of the evidence gathered, this project must consider the theory which most aptly describes the reality of digital television. Elements of all can be found in some form within the findings, but it remains to be seen which vision captures the overall thrust. In theorising how digital television has come about and the range of constituent issues that are shaping its course, I feel the work of Habermas (1989) provides the best context from which to make sense of this topic. The public sphere framework outlines how to conceptualise different elements of television and offers ways to comprehend the degree of change in the light of new circumstances. This is because it explains how various aspects of the medium undergo fundamental shifts and the forces which propel them. This line of analysis makes it possible to work out the implications of emerging patterns within the industrial structure and political background of television, but also to trace through the potential associated with the individual use of the innovations. Indeed, Corner (1999:21) advances that the ideas of

Habermas are extremely helpful in research on policy and institutions, and may help to keep issues of technology, economics, policy and culture interconnected. Since these are the matters which define the development of digital television and will determine its cultural importance, a strong case for the paradigm has been made.

For instance, on an *individual* level I feel the public sphere perspective offers the most prudent method of understanding the technological changes associated with digitalisation. As television has become an established civic resource, it follows that innovations which greatly expand its communicative possibilities should further its democratic potential substantially. So, while individuals have more control over a broader array of services, digital television represents an enhanced medium that has immense civic potential owing to its ability to facilitate a more dynamic and inclusive information flow. Moreover, some of the political plans reveal distinctly democratic overtones because the new medium is intended to act as a central node towards electronic Government projects. This conveys the democratic worth of digital television because there are plans for it to become a site for direct interaction between Government and citizens, forging closer lines of communication that are designed to improve the mechanics of the political process.

However, the effectiveness of this potential depends upon at least three crucial factors. In the first instance, such applications need to be fully operational in the sense that everyone can use them and that all the imparted information is secure. Without a user-friendly interface or the certainty of completely safe transactions it will be difficult to fulfil these goals. Secondly, the digital divide looms as a perennial matter to resolve as all individuals must have regular access to the technology in order to benefit from the advantages it offers. This however is contingent upon not just widening penetration, given that other barriers have hitherto stifled progress, as has been highlighted by research. Lastly, the continuation of these applications will be determined chiefly by the cultural habits of audiences. If viewers choose not to use digital television in this manner, the initiatives are bound to stall. It is as yet too early to say how successful e-government projects have been and whether television can become a complete civic tool in the manner that has been envisaged. I therefore suggest this is one area where future research should target because the implications will establish whether digital television can realise its immense civic promise.

Structurally though, the overall development of digital television can be accommodated within the 'refeudalised public sphere' framework because it accurately captures many of the systemic trends to explain the emergence and consequences of the innovation. This theory is able to detail why the medium alters in structure and function by situating it within the context of wider processes that are directing its course, along with the effect these have on the environment television has to operate within. In doing so, it shows that a particular type of effect flows into the programming patterns the medium disseminates. The work of Habermas is thus able to grasp the dynamic imbued within the technology so that the organisation of broadcasting and its guiding purposes are fully unravelled. In doing so, it establishes the character, extent and consequences of change.

The first factor refeudalisation draws attention to is the politically directed nature of the process digitalisation is a core component of. The evidence of this thesis confirms that the policy regime is geared towards industrial ends, as shown by the way in which competition has become the chief standard upon which media activity is based. This can be seen through the embrace of free market values for the organisation of broadcasting, with the removal of ownership restrictions forming the main principle around which the legislation has been set. The technology is therefore important in so far as it dovetails with larger political plans concerning the arrangement of social resources. Acknowledging this makes it possible to see that digitalisation is a manifestation of an established historical process of reworking the medium for economic purposes rather than a complete break in its life cycle. In many ways, Raymond Williams (1990:28) observation that historically the means of transmission have been conceived before content is extremely pertinent in capturing the operations of the institutional context of broadcasting in this respect. The need to create a market has led to the adoption of digital television and to the formulation of an official policy framework for its implementation without sufficient regard paid to the output on which to build this market.

The proof of the reorientation in television's remit is provided by the shifts in the programme strategies most clearly, although evidence is apparent at other levels too. For instance, the increasingly prevalent funding mechanism of subscription and

the underlying philosophy are illustrative of an economic mind-set that engulfs the communications realm and affects the behaviour of its firms. The refeudalised public sphere approach is strikingly correct in its analysis of how reformulating the industrial context of television feeds into the types of output produced and the overall programming ratios. My findings support the idea that there is a greater propensity towards the production of lighter genres and the placement of these within prime time slots. The study also confirmed what happens to public service broadcasting when it is not set apart from the market. As the providers are swept up by the need to secure ratings, they are compelled into adopting the same mind-set as their commercial counter-parts. Correspondingly, their schedules become increasingly based around certain kinds of entertainment to illuminate a reliance on safe formats in the main.

The tension between cultural and commercial objectives advanced by this theory is reinforced by the manner in which a different sense of mission pervades broadcasting institutions. As Tracey (1998:30) correctly points out, programme production is increasingly defined not by culture but by the exigencies of economics. Broadcast output has less of a duty to inform in these conditions because its fundamental purpose is to return market value, an achievement gained through cost-effectiveness in all operations. The ideological character of broadcasting has thus been reworked to fit in with free market ideals. Through this approach comes the dismantling of public precepts that are not commercially viable chiefly because cultural issues are defined in economic terms. Hoynes (1994:26) sums up the essence of this when explaining how the public sphere has shrunk in recent years as television falls short of its promise to contribute to democracy and instead promotes the growth of corporate power. The manner in which policy is intending to create larger business entities that are ever-more prone to the factors detailed provides strong support to this position, as does the shift in programming ratios.

Thus, current circumstances amount to another structural transformation in social resources where technology is a symptom of the broader changes going on. Digital television has been championed because of the commercial abilities it offers in terms of creating a free market in broadcasting to the extent that deregulation is the maxim on which it has been formulated. However, market failure can be detected by observing industry trends, such as the movements towards mainstream interests rather

than a preoccupation with diversity in both structural and content areas. Furthermore, while the Government has expressed sensitivity towards retaining public service broadcasting, it is not clear what sort of role it will have within a framework based around commercial imperatives. The development of digital television then can be summed up as collision of individual empowerment and structural diminishment as any degree of improvement in usage that digitalisation adds has to operate within a context defined and driven by commercial values. It is the latter which will determine the types of function available through the financial return they bring.

Habermas's (1989:176) point that the public and private realms are no longer separate, as private functions invade public space is particularly relevant in grasping the dynamics of broadcasting. The dimensions of public space are being reconfigured as structural factors shape the communications framework in a direction not conducive to democracy. The public potential digital television has must work within boundaries laid down by commercial forces. Such a situation, where public objectives depend upon market efficiency, cannot be healthy because it means civic impulses are determined by business criteria. I find considerable weight in Dahlgren's (1995:150) argument that television is following a logic of development in which public sphere principles play a minimal role as the collective space it represented has now changed to reflect the aggregation of individual interests. This perspective therefore provides strong explanatory power of what digital television is, how it has come about, the objectives to which it is committed and the consequences of the approach adopted. Public sphere theory and its refeudalised strand is therefore the model which details how digital television has been commercially driven in line with a political vision.

Moreover, the notion of Libertarianism that underpins this Government's general approach may illuminate how the free market is the overarching purpose of digitalisation, yet as an explanatory framework this theory does not capture the realities of the new television. Many of the assertions made by this position do in fact resonate with New Labour's aspirations for digital television and have clearly underpinned the decision to go digital. However, the claims of 'market sovereignty' do not stand up to close scrutiny when observing the economics of broadcasting and are thus incorrect in their understandings of the operations of such an industry. For instance, the digital landscape is being dominated by large players so that as an

industry it does not have the freedom of entry envisaged by free market theory. This is confirmed by the manner in which regulatory decisions have paved the way for larger corporate entities to structure British broadcasting, confining the sector to only those players with the most resources. Also, the importance of advertising as a primary means of finance has not yet eroded because it remains central to the overall dynamics of television. A direct system of 'on demand' payments for all content is some way off, if it happens at all.

The structural concentrations are matched by similar tendencies within the output patterns of current television which demonstrate clearly how market principles as applied to this sector lead to a convergence in content. My study illuminated how broadcasters chase the 'great middle' of the audience rather than sectional interests because of the underlying need to secure ratings. In fact, programming diversity and creativity are outcomes this model of broadcasting is steered well away from because profitability directs resources towards the familiar, not towards the new. Finally, there are as yet too many issues that need to be managed because ironically, the shift to digital has not been market led. Digital television was initially advanced and then heavily promoted by New Labour because of its commercial potential and importance towards the creation of an information society. Thus, it has taken root as a consumer product because of official support rather than developing as a direct response to audience demand. Therefore, the continual involvement of Government is crucial in the further penetration of digital television as well as sorting out key elements of the new broadcasting system, including when switchover can take place.

The Future

Clearly, digital television is the future. The Government has committed itself to switching off the analogue frequencies in the near term because of the need to create an information society and the associated aims of a free market in broadcasting. All of the institutions are keen on digitalisation because of its commercial potential and for the manner in which they are bound by the need to satisfy Government plans. As a consumer product, digital television has made enormous in-roads in a short period of time. The diffusion rate has been quite impressive, particularly after the

launch of Freeview, an alternative that offers a different kind of proposition to the subscription packages of the other platforms. For all of these reasons, there is a degree of certainty that digital television will prevail because of the hopes invested within it, the centrality it has acquired within Government plans in regards to its cultural and economic standing within society, and its performance within the consumer market.

The digital future is however far from straightforward. There are a number of fundamental matters to continually address, and it is these which will dictate whether the medium continues to penetrate and if the large-scale plans will work out as intended. All of the issues detailed within this thesis are sure to figure in the on-going transition to digital television, while the manner in which they are addressed and handled will influence the type of medium it eventually becomes. So, there is a need to keep thinking about the broad thrust of policy to include areas such as the industrial context while conglomeration takes root and foreign interests intrude further into British broadcasting. Similarly, how public service is to be conceptualised while BBC funding and Charter renewal are being formulated is another concern. Also, switchover may need to be re-evaluated, contingent as it is upon consumer take-up and a range of technological issues. All of these themes along with a multitude of others, mean that there is a high degree of complexity in regards to the management of broadcasting as it goes digital. Many of these have philosophical implications and their centrality means that the purposes of broadcasting will need to be carefully thought through as the emerging media landscape becomes ever more fixed on ideological foundations. While all of these have been addressed, the way in which they pan out will ultimately determine the shape of digital television and whether the plans for an information society come to fruition.

As for academic research, the study of television will need to evolve and expand its canon in order to grasp all of the consequences associated with digitalisation given that the changes it engenders are potentially fundamental. While technology has a transformative influence, the way the medium has been approached may have to adjust to the realities of the object it becomes. Therefore, the methods of studying television may have to be rethought so that their intellectual parameters and basic assumptions can capture the possible wide-reaching consequences in the way television operates and how audiences engage with it. For instance, psychologists

might want to interrogate the notion of 'effect' from a medium that has the capabilities of increased user input. Similarly, Cultural Studies theorists may need to comprehend the notion of 'meaning-making' and the interpretative reading of texts in a different light when audiences are able to structure the formation of the actual text itself. While it is as yet too early to know if these different aspects of change are going to embed themselves in television's relationship with its audience, the sheer possibility means academic research needs to consider some of its own foundations. This could be a moment when the old and new academic frameworks amongst the different disciplines that have studied television collide because of the requirement to rethink and rework established paradigms to fit in with the intricacies of a transformed medium that they cannot fully explain with traditional assumptions.

Certainly, there can be no doubt that television is deserved of sustained academic attention and is likely to acquire greater scholarly focus in the near future. Digitalisation has been adopted to make the medium ever more central to everyday life as a site where core social and economic activities take place. As the objectives of the information society depend substantially on the penetration of digital television, there is a more acute urgency for academic research to engage and work out whether it can fulfil these tasks and the types of factors which impede its ability to do so. Recalling how the manner in which television has been framed as important has historically delineated the modes of inquiry, it is now vital to explore the medium in depth to clarify whether it can forge the closer connections to contemporary society it has been designed to have. Research therefore needs to quantify the roles the medium is expected to fulfil, before assessing how successful it has been. By keeping up with future developments and unravelling their importance, television research will be able to calculate with precision the place of a central object in changing times.

The subject area of Television Studies therefore has an opportunity to grow and establish itself as a more mainstream academic concern in the light of this technological change. As it addresses an instrument of emblematic centrality, the discipline can gain a substantial role for itself by initiating a full body of literature to detail the core magnitude and relevance of television towards the duties it is intended to serve. In order to achieve this, Television Studies needs to scrutinise and quantify all of the implications of digitalisation together with subsequent issues that arise in

relation to the questions asked and the aims ascribed to the medium. This demands that television researchers examine all of the areas of the medium so that change in all its various aspects can be detailed to gain a full understanding of exactly what digital television is. If the subject area can grasp all of these matters, it should acquire a greater academic presence in a world increasingly dependent on communications.

However, the splintered manner in which television research has been hitherto conducted is antithetical to a thorough comprehension of the new medium. Given that most projects are based in a single discipline, the traditional focus of each has been on a discrete element of television that is examined from a distinct academic position. Any notion of change will only be considered in so far as it pertains towards a corpus of work that has its own theoretical purchase on the medium. Owing to the fact that the object has then been conceptualised within a set of different disciplinary systems, only certain parts of digital television can be captured by any of the inquiries which look into it.

Research needs to move away from single areas of inquiry and attempt to look at the whole medium because this would generate a fuller understanding of different parts of television before illustrating how they are connected with each other. This makes it imperative for a greater coherence within approaches towards television if the current changes are to be fully unravelled. The task must be to overcome the traditional dichotomies that have characterised the development of television research and forge an approach that examines institutional and audience related issues together. Such a focus would enable a fuller comprehension of the medium from where it would be able to capture the complete range of consequences associated with this development. Importantly, establishing a broadly focused and more disciplinary inclusive Television Studies should enable further new questions that arise to be easily transposed into the field's intellectual parameters, a position which would allow them to be subsequently answered with greater ease.

This is a mission that has already been addressed by television academics. Corner (1997:258) asserts that research should seek to re-engage theories of process with production so that questions of consumption and domesticity are connected to the institutional structures and specific production relations. This is particularly

pressing because individual usage of the functions digital television offers is skewed in some sense by structural factors. That is, financial concerns will dictate the types of services available and may shape how audiences engage with them. Miller (2003:18) agrees when he calls for an analytical alliance to understand television's division of labour and its forms of reception. Therefore, studying television as a whole process makes it possible to see how individual consumption may be influenced by wider factors that take place at the institutional level. Additionally, such an approach could make it possible to comprehend the application of digital technology at various junctures within the constituent parts of television and to the medium as a whole, rather than being constrained to one component. Academic work should proceed in this integrated fashion to enable television to be conceived as a distinct chain of different elements and to gauge the impact of subsequent developments on any aspect by illustrating how they are connected.

Overall, it seems pertinent to close this thesis with the observation that the manner in which television research works out the importance of key areas and incorporates the changes associated with digitalisation into its intellectual canon will determine its own success as an academic discipline. While the institutional context of television is shifting in the light of this change, the academic context should do also. As convergence symbolises the underlying mood within the realms of technology, policy and industry, where they adjust to incorporate digitalisation, academic approaches should also establish a unified position in order to successfully analyse current circumstances. Research therefore has to evolve in the same manner that the medium has and become more coherent in its approach and method in order to capture the full extent of this change. By unifying its approach through utilising the worth of the different disciplines that have studied the medium in a disparate way offers the best method of achieving these aims. This is a tough task because each angle has been founded on very different, even contradictory assumptions about the relationship between television and the audience. However, these will need to be resolved if television research can come together in order to fully examine the new medium. Hopefully, this thesis has provided a number of signposts for the directions into which television research could develop and has made a meaningful contribution to how the subject and its formative concerns can be understood.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

How important a development is digital television?

What are the main reasons behind the adoption of digital television?

Will it bring more choice and diversity?

How is the digital broadcasting system being organised?

How significant a development is it in the attempts to create an information society?

In what ways can digital television be both a civic and economic resource?

Do the industrial priorities open the way for low grade content?

What are the issues involved in the transition to a digital broadcasting system?

Will switchover happen on time and without adversely affecting some?

Will the plurality test safeguard the interests of viewers?

Does public service broadcasting have a future in the new circumstances?

How satisfied are you with the take-up?

Can a digital divide be stopped?

Is there a fair and free market in digital television?

What sort of business model is necessary for success?

Why are OFCOM keen on advancing digital television?

It seems switchover is a firm policy commitment – why is this so?

Is the intention to create a more effective free market in broadcasting and/or an information society?

It seems that switchover is necessary for achieving wider aims, making it a core political and technical issue – would you agree?

How exactly is it to be achieved? Outline the plans and conditions.

When exactly is the planned date and timetable now?

Is penetration the major criteria for switchover?

Will the market reach maturity before the 95% level set by the DAP?

What if not enough people want digital TV? How will you proceed?

How is consumer resistance to be overcome?

If the market alone will not deliver switchover, how will it be achieved?

Will switching off the analogue frequencies disadvantage some?

Can this be avoided?

You talk a lot about the business implications, can it also be a civic resource?

Some commentators feel these two aims conflict with each other – do you agree?

You say the consumer is the ultimate winner – explain.

Are there any problems with creating a free market in broadcasting or is that the aim?

Is there a danger that minorities with little financial clout will lose out?

Is the financing stretched so that there's less money allocated to programming?

Are there more repeats, imports and certain genres because of competition?

How does consumer benefit from paying for content that was once free?

Are there any negative consequences of a shift to a digital broadcasting environment?

Is there a genuine future for psb in the new circumstances?

Is the viewer more of a consumer than a citizen now?

Any advances on who you think the winners in digital television will be?

Appendix B: Definition of Public Service Broadcasting

In its first annual review of the media sector OFCOM (2004b:14) carried out a preliminary study into public service broadcasting between 1998 and 2002. It found that the genres typically thought of as public service had been increasingly marginalised over this period and were coming under increased pressure in a multichannel system. The genres it used for the analysis were:

Religion, children's programmes, arts, classical music, current affairs, news, documentary and drama.

For my study, I used all of these apart from children's programmes because the analysis was from 5pm until 12 midnight each day. Therefore, this genre was mostly avoided because children's programmes tend to be broadcast earlier in the schedule. I felt that including this genre would not have given a true representation of its relative proportion because the analysis began at 5pm.

Appendix C: Remaining Tables of the Content Study

Tables 7.6 to 7.8 detail the programmes from each data set that fit into the ‘Other’ category and the amount of time they occupied. These amounts correspond with the actual hours depicted within tables 7.3 to 7.5. They represent the proportion of the total amount of airtime used within the analysis that was outlined in table 7.2. In all cases, the total amount of ‘Other Genres’ was negligible.

Table 7.6: Other Genres - 1984

Programme Name	Channel	Genre	Amount
Case on Camera	Channel 4	Reality TV	60 minutes
The Penine Challenge	BBC 2	Reality TV	120 minutes
Appeals	BBC1 and ITV	Appeals	15 minutes
Farnborough Air Show	BBC1 and BBC2	Events	50 minutes
Southampton Boat Show	BBC2	Events	50 minutes
Clive James Going Home	ITV	Travel	60 minutes
Did You See...?	BBC2	Discussion	45 minutes
James Mason In Conversation	ITV	Discussion	40 minutes
The Dog Show	BBC2	Events	60 minutes
For What Its Worth	Channel 4	Consumer Affairs	60 minutes
Ear Say	Channel 4	Unclear	60 minutes

Source: Author’s Own Research

Table 7.7: Other Genres - 2004 Terrestrial

Programme Name	Channel	Genre	Amount
Edinburgh Military Tattoo	BBC1	Events	60 minutes
Lifeline	BBC1	Appeal	10 minutes
Points of View	BBC1	Comment	55 minutes
Watchdog	BBC1	Consumer Affairs	90 minutes
UK's Maddest Magicians	Channel 5	Magic	35 minutes
Mercury Music Prize	BBC2	Events	25 minutes
Guinness World Records	ITV	Unclear	120 minutes
Great Magic Tricks	Channel 5	Magic	55 minutes
I'll Show Them Who's Boss	BBC2	Unclear	120 minutes
Prince Harry in Lesotho	ITV	Travel	60 minutes
Eurotrash	Channel 4	Unclear	20 minutes
Mesh	Channel 4	Unclear	20 minutes
Tickled Pink	Channel 5	Events	70 minutes
4 Pieces of Me	Channel 5	Comment	20 minutes
The Day I...	Channel 4	Comment	5 minutes

Source: Author's Own Research

Table 7.8: Other Genres - 2004 Digital

Programme Name	Channel	Genre	Amount
Dancing in the Street	ITV2	Unclear	100 minutes
Guinness World Records	ITV2	Unclear	60 minutes
Mind Invader	Sky 1	Magic	60 minutes
Euromillions Live Draw	Sky 1	Unclear	20 minutes

Source: Author's Own Research

Table 7.9: % Repeat By Genre - 1984

Genre	BBC1	BBC2	ITV	Channel 4	Overall
Documentary and Educational	15.6	35.4	-	21.5	22.8
Religion	4.5	-	-	-	1.4
Other Comedy	1.7	8.1	21.1	-	5.3
Children's	11.9		13.2	-	4.8
Situation Comedy	32	6.6	2.6	-	12.4
Pop Music	4	-	-	1.8	1.7
Sport	-	8.3	-	-	3
Variety	-	-	-	9.2	2.3
Current Affairs	-	-	-	1.8	0.4
Comment	-	0.6	-	-	0.2
Quiz and Game Shows	-	1	-	-	0.4
Classical Music	-	1	-	-	0.4
Arts	-	2.3	-	2.5	1.4
Other	-	-	10.5	-	0.9
Drama	12.4	15.4	52.6	18.8	18.5
Fictional Series	17.9	17.6	-	40.7	21.8
Nostalgia	-	3.7	-	-	1.4
Lifestyle	-	-	-	3.7	0.9
Total	33 hours 35 minutes	40 hours 10 minutes	9 hours 30 minutes	27 hours 5 minutes	110 hours 20 minutes

Source: Author's Own Research

Tables 7.9 to 7.14 show how the repeats and imports of each channel and system were made up by detailing which genres predominated. This made it possible to see if there had been any significant changes in the types of imported and repeated programming across the different channels and systems. Each channel's percentage was calculated by dividing its genre figure by the total amount of repeats or imports. The overall figure was worked out by adding up all of the channels within a system to see which genres dominated across the system as a whole. The percentages in the overall column therefore refer to the total number of repeats or imports across that particular system.

Table 7.9 reveals how the repeats of each channel and the overall system of 1984 were made up. It extends upon figure 7.1 on page 243 because it not only shows the type of genres which were repeated on any of the channels, but also which dominated across the system as a whole. Table 7.9 reveals that across the terrestrial system of 1984, documentary was the most repeated genre, amounting to 25 hours and 15 minutes across the four channels. Fictional series was another often repeated genre, with a total amount across the whole system of 24 hours and 5 minutes, while drama added up to 20 hours and 25 minutes.

Table 7.10 % Repeat By Genre - Terrestrial 2004

Genre	BBC1	BBC2	ITV	Channel 4	Five	Overall
Fictional Series	37.1	-	73.7	44.7	34.2	31.3
Situation Comedy	26.8	17.1	-	36.6	-	17.6
Real Life Crime	11.5	1.2	-	-	-	2
Docusoaps	7.7	5.3	-	0.8	-	3
Documentary and Educational	5.7	26.4	9	7.4	31.8	18
Quiz and Game Shows	6.4	18.3	6.5	-	-	7.5
Lifestyle	4.8	15.1	-	4.9	6.3	7.6
Drama	-	6.2	-	-	-	1.9
Other Comedy	-	5.3	7.6	5.6	5.3	4.9
Nostalgia	-	2.1	-	-	-	0.6
Arts	-	3	3.2	-	-	1.3
The Bizarre	-	-	-	-	9.9	1.9
Celebrity News	-	-	-	-	5.1	1
Reality TV	-	-	-	-	4.7	0.9
Other	-	-	-	-	2.7	0.5
Total	26 hours 5 minutes	56 hours 25 minutes	23 hours 5 minutes	40 hours 25 minutes	34 hours 35 minutes	179 hours 35 minutes

Source: Author's Own Research

Table 7.10 reveals how the repeats of each channel and the overall terrestrial system of 2004 were made up. It also extends upon figure 7.1 on page 243 because it illuminates which genres were repeated most across this broadcasting system. Fictional series was the most repeated genre here with a total amount of 56 hours and 35 minutes over the five terrestrial channels in 2004. Meanwhile, there was 31 hours and 30 minutes of repeated situation comedies over the terrestrial system of 2004.

Table 7.11: % Repeat By Genre - 2004 Digital

Genre	BBC3	BBC4	ITV2	E4	Sky One	Overall
Fictional Series	14.8	-	21	28.4	52.1	29.7
Situation Comedy	11.5	2.5	1.5	43.4	35.9	24.3
Reality TV	-	-	38.1	24	2.1	15.9
Other Comedy	1.7	2.5	2.1	4	5	3.4
Pop Music	-	-	2.3	0.2	-	0.6
The Bizarre	2.6	-	1.8	-	1.4	1.2
Drama	3.5	10	-	-	-	1.3
Celebrity Chat Shows	5.2	-	3.1	-	-	1.4
Sport	11.8	-	-	-	-	1.4
Travel	-	6.3	-	-	-	0.5
Docusoaps	11.4	-	-	-	-	1.4
Discussion	-	2.9	-	-	-	0.2
Lifestyle	33.1	-	-	-	-	4
Classical Music	-	3.8	-	-	-	0.3
Celebrity News	4.4	-	-	-	-	0.5
Arts	-	20.8	-	-	-	1.7
Quiz and Game Shows	-	-	5.2	-	-	1.2
Documentary and Educational	-	51.2	-	-	2.1	4.9
Talk Shows	-	-	24	-	-	5.5
Real Life Crime	-	-	-	-	1.4	0.4
Other	-	-	0.9	-	-	0.2

Total	57 hours 20 minutes	39 hours 45 minutes	108 hours 35 minutes	128 hours	140 hours	473 hours 40 minutes
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Source: Author's Own Research

Table 7.11 provides a follow up to figure 7.2 on page 245. It shows that across the digital channels, fictional series was in fact the most repeated genre, adding up to 140 hours and 40 minutes. Situation comedy provided a significant 114 hours and 55 minutes, while reality TV amounted to 75 hours and 5 minutes across the five channels as a whole.

Table 7.12: % Import by Genre - 1984

Genre	BBC1	BBC2	ITV	Channel 4	Total (%)
Film	59.8	57.3	15.5	54.4	47
Arts	-	-	-	5.3	1.8
Drama	17.2	10.7	33.2	-	13.9
Other Comedy	-	5.5	5.2	-	2.2
Children's	3	0.6	-	-	0.8
Variety	-	-	2.6	-	0.6
Pop Music	-	-	-	2.6	0.9
Situation Comedy	6.4	4.1	3.2	27.1	12.4
Fictional Series	13.6	21.8	40.3	10.6	20.4
Total	39 hours 10 minutes	30 hours 10 minutes	38 hours 50 minutes	56 hours 50 minutes	165 hours

Source: Author's Own Research

Table 7.12 reveals how the imports of each channel and the overall terrestrial system of 1984 were made up and extends upon figure 7.3 on page 247 because it illuminates which genres were imported most across the system as a whole. Film was the most imported genre, totalling 77 hours and 40 minutes. Fictional series meanwhile amounted to 33 hours and 35 minutes, while there were 22 hours and 55 minutes of imported drama.

Table 7.13: % Import by Genre - Terrestrial 2004

	BBC1	BBC2	ITV	Channel 4	Five	Total (%)
Film	66.2	51.2	100	35	52.9	51.5
Fictional Series	33.8	-	-	37.9	36.4	31
Situation Comedy	-	38.4	-	22.4	-	10.7
Documentary and Educational	-	10.4	-		6.1	3.5
Other Comedy	-	-	-	1.5	-	0.5
Real Life Crime	-	-	-	-	1.4	0.6
Docusoaps	-	-	-	3.2	-	1
Celebrity News	-	-	-	-	3.2	1.2
Total	27 hours 5 minutes	20 hours 5 minutes	10 hours 35 minutes	66 hours 55 minutes	88 hours 5 minutes	213 hours 30 minutes

Source: Author's Own Research

Table 7.13 reveals how the imports of each channel and the overall terrestrial system of 2004 were made up and extends upon figure 7.3 on page 247 in the process. It shows that film was the most imported genre on the terrestrial channels of 2004 because it added up to 110 hours and 50 minutes. There was also 66 hours and 35 minutes of imported fictional series across the five channels.

Table 7.14: % Import by Genre - Digital 2004

Genre	BBC 3	BBC 4	ITV 2	E4	Sky 1	Total (%)
Film	85.2	87.2	38.3	3.9	7.5	21
Documentary and Educational	-	8.4	-	-	-	0.4
Drama	-	2.6	-	-	-	0.1
Situation Comedy	14.8	1.8	2.6	33.7	35	24.1
Talk Shows	-	-	21.4	-	-	5.2
Docusoaps	-	-	3.6	-	-	0.9
Other Comedy	-	-	3.4	-	-	0.8
Sport	-	-	0.5	-	-	0.1
Pop Music	-	-	1.8	0.2	-	0.5
Real Life Crime	-	-	2	-	-	0.5
Fictional Series	-	-	-	41.2	54.6	31.4
Reality TV	-	-	26.4	21	-	14.1
Lifestyle	-	-	-	-	2.2	0.7
Others	-	-	-	-	0.7	0.2
Total	19 hours 40 minutes	22 hours 50 minutes	109 hours 40 minutes	165 hours 15 minutes	134 hours 10 minutes	451 hours 35 minutes

Source: Author's Own Research

Table 7.14 extends on figure 7.4 on page 249 by revealing that of the digital channels, fictional series was the most imported genre for this data set, adding up to 141 hours and 15 minutes. There was also 108 hours and 55 minutes of imported situation comedies on these channels, along with 94 hours and 50 minutes of film.

