# *Exemplarity, pedagogy and television history*

Article

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**Exemplarity, pedagogy and television history**

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Abstract

This article addresses some theoretical problems raised by the citation of examples of popular television drama in teaching and writing about British 1960s and 1970s programmes. It argues that examples shape theorists' and students' understanding because citing an example relies on a notion of a canon whose constitution, inclusions and exclusions represent a larger context and history. Yet an example must therefore exceed the field it stands for, and also be more than typical. This duality between representativeness and exceptionalness is necessarily the case, and the article ranges widely over recent writing to demonstrate its implications in academic work on programmes including *Doctor Who* and *The Avengers*. It also refers to the processes of commissioning and writing in the author's own work and considers the use of examples in different academic publishing contexts. The article argues for the reflexivity of television pedagogy and publication as situated rhetorical practices, to raise questions of methodology that necessarily but sometimes unconsciously energise the discipline of Television Studies, and especially the study of television history.

Television drama: histories and hierarchies

This article thinks through some of the theoretical problems raised by the citation of

examples of popular television drama in teaching and writing about British 1960s and

1970s programmes. It reflects on the experience of designing courses and writing course

texts in the British university context, specifying the questions of nation, region and

international context that border the article's topic. I consider what examples do when

they are cited in academic texts, and explore how examples shape Television Studies

theorists' and students' understanding of popular British drama. I shall mainly refer to

programmes, rather than audiences or institutions, since the canon is implicitly composed

of textual objects that form the locus for wider study. Examples shape the understanding

of popular British television drama. Citing an example relies on a notion of a canon (if

not *the* canon): a sense of how British television drama is constituted, what it includes and excludes, and how it can be represented by selecting those examples. In the course texts of British television teaching, a programme becomes an example representing a larger context and history. Yet such a programme must therefore exceed the range it represents, and be regarded as more than typical as soon as that example is cited instead of the others which could have been chosen. This duality between representativeness and exceptionalness is necessarily the case with any example, but it becomes especially problematic for teaching and writing about television because of the nature of television as a popular medium about which everyone has an opinion and a memory.

Historically, the academic study of British television drama initially placed the now-rare single television play and the segmented episodes of the prime-time high-profile television serial at the centre of its curriculum and at the head of its hierarchy of canonical programmes. George Brandt's edited collection *British Television Drama* (1981) for example, contains essays that each address a different writer's work, analysing selected drama examples in detail. Though valuable, it focuses on a limited range of well-established male writers of 'serious' television plays or serials. John Tulloch's 1990 book, significantly subtitled *Agency, Audience and Myth*, combines work on Trevor Griffiths' strongly authored television writing with empirical research on Australian viewers of popular drama and explicitly contested what Tulloch saw as Brandt's conservative, patriarchal and high-cultural canon. Maintaining the emphasis in British studies on the political effectivity of television drama as an arena of political communication, Tulloch's intervention also questioned the hierarchisation of drama into the 'serious' and 'popular' and signalled an interest in reception that would become

increasingly prevalent. The divergence of focus between Brandt's and Tulloch's approaches represented an active contestation of the canon and the theoretical assumptions to be brought to television drama study, and the debate continued when Brandt's subsequent collection *British Television Drama in the 1980s* (1993) adopted what has become a more usual structure in which essays focus debates through analyses of specific programmes, rather than through writers.  The 1993 collection included work on generic formats such as sitcom, soap opera and popular drama serials as well as single plays, but authors' names still featured in each essay's title.  In his introduction to the volume, Brandt (1993: 17) wondered whether the 'best' television drama of the 1980s was 'the golden glow of a setting sun', and defended a text-based and literary set of critical terms displaced by the 'redemptive readings' of popular texts and celebrations of popular pleasure which had begun to mark a shift in television criticism since the late 1970s.

More recent approaches to television and the media in general have valued 'the popular' because of its engagement with the day-to-day cultural experience of the citizens of modern societies, and its ideological role in locating the social subject.  Robin Nelson's *TV Drama in Transition* (1997) gives a brief account of what had become the orthodox history, with its emphases on authorship, the single play, and a lament for the lost 'golden age', so that he can demonstrate both how television drama has become different (especially in the dominance of popular series drama and exclusion of authored anthology plays) and also discuss the paradigm shift in critical discourse that addressed audiences, valued generic formats such as the hospital drama and police series, and diagnosed cultural shifts into postmodernity.  Nelson's examples reflect this sense of

transition to different objects of analysis, and include US-produced popular drama and drama series, with relatively few chapters dealing with the dramas that Brandt and Tulloch, for example, had regarded as landmarks, and with no substantial focus on writers. For Nelson (1997: 3), the shift taking place is 'to figures of (individual) difference, flexibility, dispersal, diversity'. Nelson suggests that this is a shift from modernity to postmodernity in television programming, but it is also a shift in the critical discourse that interacts with television and constitutes it as an object. But by the end of the century, the pendulum had swung to the extent that I and other television specialists perceived a need to re-evaluate the question of authorship and the definitions, significance and legacy of the 'golden age' single authored drama of the 1960s and 1970s previously identified by Brandt and others. The collection of essays by television writers, producers and academics that I collaborated on (Bignell *et al* 2000) aims to connect more recent examples (such as plays by the emergent writer Lynda LaPlante and the already-canonised Dennis Potter) with that 'golden age' and to question its constitution both by academics and professionals in the television industry. With similar re-evaluative aims, John Caughie's excellent study (2000) addresses British television drama from the 1930s to the 1990s in relation to aesthetic debates on naturalism, modernism, realism and authorship. It focuses on 'serious' drama, unpacking the assumptions about political engagement, aesthetics, and relationships with literature, theatre and performance that have been adduced to defend and legitimate authored television drama in Britain. Most significantly, the book historicises the production of discourses of seriousness and quality, and understands them as located in specific cultural debates that crystallized around television drama but were broader in origin or application. This awareness of the

historiographic discourse that constructs the corpus to be analyzed, and reflects on the evaluative schemas beyond the television text that inform its production and reception, was necessarily addressed in Jason Jacobs' (2000) study of British television drama from 1936-55. Because of the lack of archive recordings, Jacobs was forced to develop an archeological approach, reconstructing drama aesthetics from production notes, set designs and scripts. As historical television drama studies grew and diversified, its methodologies and its objects of analysis changed and were written about with much greater reflexivity.

But the tensions in exemplarity that I am focusing on still remain, as brief references to recent work can demonstrate. Lez Cooke's history of British television drama (2003) is organized chronologically, moving from the live productions of the 1930s through the single plays, popular generic series and political dramas of the 1960s and 1970s to the political drama and heritage drama of the 1980s, and the high-concept authored drama that also attracted large audiences in the 1990s. As Cooke (2003: 5) points out, 'periodisation does enable us to identify certain broad tendencies in the historical development of British television drama'. The dangers of writing this teleological narrative are explained, but Cooke's insights into changing technologies, institutions and aesthetic arguments can only make sense in relation to a temporal sequence whose overarching movement has to be captured at selected turning points. There is a necessary tension between Cooke's (2003: 2) two components of 'main tendencies and important moments' that leads to the choice of examples such as 'landmark serials' and representatives of 'the ascendancy of soap opera' that attempt to crystallize historical processes through key texts. The same issue affects Michelle

Hilmes' 2003 collection, produced with Jacobs' assistance. Though it does not focus exclusively on drama, the book begins as Cooke's does with a debate about historiography. The awareness of historiography as discourse that I have traced in the development of studies of British television drama is prominent, and draws attention to the boundaries and exclusions that are my focus here. Hilmes' collection has two sections on programmes, but among these 53 pages there is only one essay (Wheatley 2003) that grounds a historical account in an analysis of a specific British drama programme. Surprisingly, given the centrality of drama to previous publication on British television history, drama is largely diffused into narrative overviews of periods and critical issues in Hilmes' collection. I shall discuss the political economy of academic publishing below, since this is one of the constituting forces that Hilmes scarcely addresses in the book's preface (2003: vii-viii) and that I think leads to the omission of British drama examples. But one delimiting force that Hilmes discusses is the national and regional specificity of the volume, addressed in terms of the origins of the contributing writers in the book, and the industrial and aesthetic influence of British and US television production.

The issue of nationality is important here, because a widespread pride in British television drama as being 'the best in the world' is constituted partly by citing programmes originated by British programme-makers. Certain examples with British provenance or thematic concerns are often brought forward as evidence, such as the drama-documentary *Cathy Come Home* (BBC 1966) about the social problem of homelessness, or the sitcom *Dad's Army* (BBC 1966-77) that negotiates memories and imagined histories of Britain's homeland defence forces during the Second World War.

But that national pride is also constituted against imported programmes (as well as those that are perceived to be influenced too much by external cultural forces). With the knowledge that the US television industry in particular has been more technologically sophisticated and economically powerful than Britain's (at least since the 1950s), national pride in domestic broadcasting also has to deal with the widespread belief that television was doomed to eventual colonisation and subservience to US programme formats, imports and funding models. Furthermore, these caricatures of US television lent force to an assumption that television as a medium was in itself a supplement that was added to a pre-existing national specificity and would therefore undermine the family, encourage audience passivity, smuggle American values into British broadcasting, and displace an organic working-class culture. The immediate success of the ITV commercial channel on Britain from 1955 onwards provided ready examples for these pessimistic arguments, and it is significant that it is examples of BBC programmes and not ITV ones that are most readily used as examples of the achievements of British television drama (and British television in general).

The drift of these associated but distinct pressures has been to lend legitimacy to writing and teaching in the UK about television drama that centres on a social realist aesthetic, and values formal complexity, reflexivity, the importance of authorship, and an engagement with contemporary issues that are recognisable from non-dramatic forms, from literature, and from news and current affairs discourses. Canonical status has been attributed to programmes that are based on cultural forms that have been accorded greater prestige, such as the adaptation of 'classic' literature and theatre, or have assimilated the related value given to authorship in the prestige television play or authored serial

(Chapman 2002, pp.3-4). So the canon is slanted towards drama that claims, or can be argued to claim, political engagement or to work on the aesthetics of television by adopting new formal conventions. With some exceptions, this association has taken place around high-profile prime-time programmes that are peripheral to the generic closure supposed to delimit series and serial drama in the popular genres of fantasy or comedy, for example. But the mutual definition of the canonical and the popular against each other produces an illusory boundary. There are certainly programmes that transgress this boundary, as the mention of the popular but canonical *Dad's Army* above suggests, and this demonstrates the current instability of the television drama canon in the face of some of the issues discussed in this article. In devising entries in his edited collection of 'key' television programmes, Glen Creeber (2004) included plenty of British drama programmes that do not easily fit this characterisation of the canonical, such as the ITV soap opera *Coronation Street* (Granada 1960-), the science fiction series *Doctor Who* (BBC 1963-89), and the sitcom *Till Death Us Do Part* (BBC 1965-75, remade as *All In The Family*, CBS 1971-9). Creeber also includes twenty programmes (at least, depending on how the criterion is applied) that originated outside Britain, and of course not all of his selections are dramas.

There is a complex interaction in the pedagogy and publishing about British television drama between a heritage of interest in the social-realist single television play, a concern for nationally-specific themes, settings and topics in drama, and the valuation of authorship. On the other hand, there are also more recently emergent pressures that have redirected the impetus of pedagogy and critical publication. These include the interest in the popular, variously conceived, the acceptance of the significance of

imported and especially US programmes to British television history, and the development of critical discourses that investigate genres rather than single programmes (for example, Osgerby & Gough-Yates 2001).  Added to these, academic interest in audience responses rather than textual aesthetics, and the waning certainty of the assumption of the political Left that progressive texts produce progressive viewers, also lead to instability in the legitimating procedures that teaching and writing about British television drama can use.  This legitimation crisis has consequent effects on the selection of examples in work on histories of British television drama, and the ways that examples are defended and their theoretical implications explored.

Pedagogy and exemplarity

The rhetorical structures common in recent pedagogical writing and teaching about British television drama in the 1960s and 1970s have some shared features and attendant problems.  First, the heritage of British Cultural Studies' discourses about broadcasting institutions demands work on programmes' institutional contexts, such as the Public Service obligations of the BBC and commercially-funded ITV companies, and tensions between imagined national audiences in Britain and the economic need for programme export to the USA.  This extends into study of historical and cultural contexts such as the relationship between the television medium and discourses of modernity and contemporaneity, the connections between television viewership and consumption practices, engagements with youth culture and the 'swinging 60s' as television addressed newly-recognised audiences and emergent social concerns, and brief production histories of programme examples to show how personnel, technology and economic forces

impacted on them.  As soon as a programme example is selected for study, it opens onto a series of larger questions about the frameworks in which it was situated and from where it can be understood.  For writing and teaching require a response to the twin problems of working on programmes' meanings at the point of the production and reception, and their current accessibility and significance for present-day students.

Second, methodologies deriving from literary and film studies have historically been adapted for the study of television programmes, and their focus on the construction of meaning and the aesthetic resources of the channels of communication in image and sound produce dominant pedagogical questions and expectations of what the study of television drama will include and what this study will prioritise.  So there are implicit requirements for work on the ideologies and aesthetics of programmes, which, when addressing television of past decades, are often admitted as restricted and conservative in their representation of gender for example, and structurally reduce political issues to conflicts between protagonist and antagonist.  The constraints of available production and post-production technologies and limited budgets in long-running, low-prestige or format-driven drama can leave the teacher, writer and student with comparatively simple and uninteresting shots to discuss, in programmes that were understood by their makers as commodity products rather than objects of 'quality'.  However, against this apparently unpromising background, writing and teaching are often concerned to identify some detailed but important features that make a programme aesthetically significant.  These might include self-consciousness of medium and reflexivity in a programme's narration, lavish visual textures or uses of colour, the remarkable appeal of some of its performers, or its lasting legacy as the inspiration for subsequent programmes.  Writing and teaching

seek to demonstrate the seduction and challenge that encode programmes as emblems of resistant political identity, either through gender or politics, or in aspects of their form, or because an attention to popular culture is argued to be radical in itself.  The concluding argument found in this field of writing and teaching becomes a claim for the example to be both typical and exceptional.

To exemplify these constraints and opportunities, consider the case of the British adventure series *The Avengers* (ATV 1961-9).  Academic analysis of *The Avengers*, and also its popular following, centres largely on its later episodes in which colour film and larger budgets produced an emphasis on a camp mode of performance, and a visual style that borrowed from the emergent pop-art aesthetic of the period which had made a significant impact on commercial culture in fashion, advertising imagery and elsewhere. David Buxton (1990) for instance argued that *The Avengers* represented a Pop series in which style predominates over content, making a distinction between this and another category of the television series, the 'human nature' series, in which problems are referred back to psychological and existential issues. This argument adopts the example of *The Avengers* to represent the genre of the law-enforcement series, here inflected with other generic components such as spy drama and television fantasy drama, and links the programme's textual aesthetic to a socio-cultural context that can also allow meditation on gender representation, medium-specificity, intertextuality and intermediality.  The example becomes important partly for its own sake as an unusual and interesting manipulation of these codes, conventions and opportunities in television, but also stands in as an example of a certain generic type, a historical period in television and the wider popular culture of that period, and a point of departure for large-scale theorisation of such

issues as postmodernist aesthetic reflexivity that have also been followed through in work on later programmes, especially *Miami Vice* (NBC, UK tx 1985-90).

What is significant to this article is not how different or new interpretations of programmes like *The Avengers* could be offered that would redirect the arguments presented in texts that teach about British television, though I am interested in their arguments as contributions to the field of television history. Instead, I am mainly concerned with how television pedagogy, as a mode of writing and teaching, is informed and shaped by the different political economies of knowledge and cultures of study in different areas of thought and activity. For the shaping of the canon of television drama, and the ways that shaping could or should be changed, do not take place in a vacuum. The television study undertaken by teachers and students becomes present as an object of thought through these political economies and cultures, just as the making of television itself is affected by the related political economies and cultures of television institutions, audiences and practitioners. The spatial metaphors such as those of 'field' or 'area' are suggestive of how what can be known, taught and disputed depends on the setting of coordinates that map out British television drama. This activity of mapping is importantly constituted by the choices of programme examples that are made, and how those examples establish centres, margins, familiar and unfamiliar symbolic landmarks that condition what the area or field might be. This article itself is engaged in that process as well as reflection upon it, and needs to be understood as a discourse that necessarily occupies an unstable position among these coordinates as it both takes them as its reference points and also seeks to relativise its own position. Inasmuch as the process of illustrative citation in this article is itself a selection of examples, it too is

conditioned by the theoretical issues around the rhetorical function and the duality of representativeness and non-representativeness that I have already outlined. The selection of examples is both contingent and necessary, and one of the main points I want to make here is that this contingency and necessity have contrasting implications. The contingency of choices leaves open the discursive space for debate about both the chosen example itself as a text, and also about its function as an occasion for discussion of a broader aesthetic, historical, institutional or other critical question. On the other hand, inasmuch as the example has a crystallising and fixing role in securing an argument or building a critical approach, the example has an implied necessity and formative place as a foundation that cannot be simply exchanged for an alternative one.

## Memory, significance and dissemination

Television has long been regarded as a medium that has a special relationship with its viewers' everyday lives. In a sense, the scholarly study of the histories of British television drama is a process of estranging familiar programmes, introducing programme examples to readers and students who may find them very unfamiliar and peculiar, and attaining some kind of critical distance from what is or was quotidian and taken for granted. Writing and teaching about television often becomes a way to begin pleasurable talk about the programmes people remember, half-remember, loved or hated. The evidence for television historiography, inasmuch as it consists of programmes that were once contemporary broadcasts and are now either not shown or are framed as 'classics' from the archives, must necessarily prompt a feeling of pastness and loss. While this does not devalue academic study, it does bind it closely to the ways television is remembered

by non-academics, students and the wider public. There is therefore a dual imperative to address programmes in ways that call for readers and students to grow up, and to be no longer affected by the regression that nostalgia involves, and also to imagine themselves back in a past that they have either forgotten or may never have experienced. But these pedagogical relationships to an example risk forgetting that the remembering of television as an academic project cannot in principle be separated from the remembering of television as pleasure in social talk.

This kind of remembering of television draws attention to the aesthetic questions and structural interpretations that academic work on television has sometimes overlooked by failing to pay attention to the punctuation of programmes by memorable moments and the ways these are given form by social interaction and their placing in the narratives of a life-history. For example, here is a memory of episode 1 of the *Doctor Who* serial 'The Dalek Invasion of Earth' (BBC 1964), recounted by James Robertson of Swansea, Wales, in 1988. In this episode of the serial, the megalomaniac mechanical creatures the Daleks have invaded Earth. They were already established as the time-travelling Doctor's antagonists in earlier serials, and millions of viewers, especially children, were looking forward to their appearance on screen. 'The return of the Daleks was looked forward to with great excitement by me, and my friends. I can remember everyone cutting out pictures from the paper and *The Radio Times* and playing Daleks after school. Then on that Saturday afternoon, about five of us went round to my friend's house and we all watched in silence as the episode was shown […] the ending when the Dalek appeared out of the Thames had us all cheering' (in Mulkern 1988, pp. 19-20). Collective play and gathering supporting media materials reinforced the significance and meaning of one

striking image from the story, and might connect interestingly with academic work on the aesthetics of revelatory visual moments in popular drama. Growing up with popular television drama shapes its pleasures and the ways that programmes are remembered, and the theme of growing up is sometimes reflexively present occasionally in programmes themselves as well as being part of the negotiation of their significance, as it was in this *Doctor Who* serial, when the Doctor's teenage grand-daughter Susan remained on Earth at the end of the serial to begin an 'adult' relationship with a subsidiary character after battling the Daleks. There are many reasons to select this programme, this episode, and this moment in the episode as an example to explore histories of British television drama though textual approaches, reception analysis, and cultural history.

But the viewer's memory that I quoted above was not recorded in an academic study concerned with ethnographies of popular television drama but in the fan publication *Doctor Who Magazine*, and the discursive location of information raises questions about the relationship between academic studies of television history and the dissemination of its findings. Working on television that people remember connects with fan writing about popular television, which often makes claims for the quality and canonicity of programmes. As I have explained, the academic evaluation of quality in British television drama has focused on its social realist tradition, or on its relationship with literary texts or auteurism. Work on popular television has attempted to justify quality by claiming a relationship with one or both of these traditions. Academic work has brought science fiction television to academic attention and implicitly drawn it into the canon (e.g. Tulloch and Alvarado 1983, Tulloch and Jenkins 1992). Recent publication has also focused on action and adventure television, and some of this work, such as Toby Miller's book on

*The Avengers* (1997), is also aimed a general readership, and uses the academic valuation of audience activity and fandom as a justification for this connection with a broader public: 'The life of any internationally popular TV series is a passage across space and time, a life remade over and over again by discourses, institutions, practices of production, distribution and reception, and the shifts in tempo and context that characterise cultural commodities. Cult TV texts are transformed from broadcast programming into the property of varied and productive publics' (Miller 1997. p.5). The diversity of these publics, however, needs to specify how a textual object such as a television episode changes its meaning according to generational memory, since its exemplarity changes according to these different temporal and cultural contexts. Some of Buxton's assumptions about the examplarity of *The Avengers* that I mentioned above reappear in Miller's contribution, where the celebration of an aesthetics of surface (and of the specifically camp style which can be regarded as a subset of this) is a mechanism for connecting a segment of the general popular readership interested in television nostalgia and 'cult' television, to academic work on gender, identity, popular culture and visual culture in modernity. However, the most significant difficulty in Miller's book is that it pays scant attention to the placing of the programme and its reception historically and culturally. Miller is interested in how different versions of the programme are transmitted, and how spin-off texts and fan practices change the meaning of the programme, and how it is repeated in different eras and understood in different ways. But the freeing of the programmes from their contexts of production and consumption tends to lead to celebration and too close a relationship with relatively uncritical and certainly unreflective fan discourse. The example of *The Avengers* becomes a locus for

competing as well as complementary discourses, thus losing some of the specificity of analysis that writing and teaching about programmes from the past requires. Television drama means different things for different audiences, and generational differences between writers, teachers and their students have effects on what the category of television drama is perceived to include and how representativeness and exemplarity will be different for different age-groups.

There are good reasons, however, for the slippage between the academic precision that I am arguing for here and the celebratory tone that I have drawn attention to in the example of Miller's (1997) study. There is some similarity of approach between the idea of quality in academic television studies and the interests of television fans, who might be assumed to adopt a quite different attitude. The criterion of seriousness, for example, is part of both academic criticism's canon-forming activities and those of fans. Tony Attwood's (1983) book about the British science fiction series *Blake's 7* (BBC 1978-81) presents information about the programme some time after its end, largely for a fan readership eager for the format to be revivified or turned into a film, and makes claims for the programme that strongly contradict its invisibility in academic publishing: '"Blake's 7" represented a unique attempt in the UK to mount a serious space futures serial. It presented heroes who were not invincible and escapades which were all the more plausible because they didn't always work…. This book commemorates one of the most important developments in television drama for over a decade' (Attwood 1983, p.9). The criteria of seriousness, formal innovation and realism are each present here, and demonstrate how the different discursive locations of academic and fan writing can overlap and complement each other. Claims to significance in writing for fans are

connected with the pleasure of memory and with canonicity and quality, just as teaching and writing about canonicity and about examples that border the canon of British television drama are not solely disinterested activities but also pleasurable ones.

The reason for quoting fan publications on *Doctor Who* and *Blake's 7* is that I have recently written about Terry Nation's writing for these and other popular dramas, in collaboration with Andrew O'Day, a graduate student and *Doctor Who* fan (Bignell and O'Day 2004). The experience of producing the book gives me access to knowledge about the project's history and its political economy that is rarely available in discussions of published work. In other words, it is possible not only to discuss these programmes here as examples from the history of British television drama, but also to historicise the production of the historiographic writing itself. Academic projects on television history are conceived for a certain niche in the academic publishing sector, and the readerships imagined for them affect the writing, as do the competing claims of different strands of work in Television Studies. Writing about Terry Nation for Manchester University Press's new series of academic monographs created a tension between our project and non-academic discourses, and between the readerships that we imagined for the book. The series publishes volumes that each focus on a television screenwriter or creator of television programmes, and this author-based approach has for a long time been marginal to British academic work about television. Clearly, the remit of the book series as a whole raises issues about the status of authorship within broadcasting institutions, and the degree to which individual agency can be regarded as a coherent topic for discussion.

There is extensive non-academic publication on Nation's work, such as articles in the magazines *TV Zone* and *Doctor Who Magazine*, but very little work on his output in

texts with pedagogical or research aims. Choosing the discourse to adopt in the book, to

address which group of readers, was a major problem.  The publisher (and myself as an

editor of the series) wanted the book to interest academics working on television history

and aesthetics, and also the large international readership of books on science fiction

television and popular and 'cult' television in general such as are addressed by Miller's

(1997) study of *The Avengers*.  The book needed to be accurate in its discussion of

programmes, and aware of the disputes and agendas in fan culture. For instance, *Doctor*

*Who* fans regard Nation's scripts as formative in the programme's evolution since he

introduced the most popular of the Doctor's opponents, the Daleks, in 1963, and

contributed significantly to the programme's shift of emphasis from historical and

scientific education to adventure drama.  But fans criticise Nation strongly for

overshadowing Raymond Cusick, the BBC designer who realised the look of the Daleks,

since Nation copyrighted the Daleks to himself and made a fortune from the associated

merchandising. On one hand, the need to take a position on this issue meant that we had

to devote a lot of space to the details of production personnel's work on *Doctor Who*,

with a danger of sidelining Nation to some extent.  But on the other hand, this supported

our academic arguments about the collaborative culture of television production. In the

book, we note some of the evidence for a Terry Nation 'signature' in the repeated

programme ideas, plot structures and political subtexts of his television work, but we

stress the combination of forces of writer, producer, script editor, director and other

personnel who were involved in bringing these programmes to the screen. Nation devised

original formats but his work for his own series, as well as for series conceived by others,

was subject to extensive revision by script editors, for example, and the authority of

producers and BBC executives. Choosing the programmes Nation worked on as our examples meant negotiating different canons, readerships and discourses.

When the book deals with the interpretation of programmes that Nation worked on, we were also aware of the collaborative context in which viewers, critics and we ourselves have made meanings from those programmes, so our focus on this popular television is also in dialogue with academic criticism's formation of canons of texts and the role of audience studies as a legitimating discourse for selecting popular programmes as examples worthy of analysis.  Furthermore, the texts and practices that border the programmes Nation wrote, such as his career in comedy writing, parallel and subsequent kinds of text such as novelisations of his screenplays, merchandise, or fan-produced texts, raised questions about what the textual objects under discussion were. Our focus on the authorship, production processes and reception of popular television science fiction needed to combine work on television institutions, aesthetics, production contexts and histories, and thematic concerns. We were interested in how the concerns of television theory shape the understandings of Nation and his work in the discipline of Television Studies, and our project necessarily inhabited the conflict between an authorial approach more customary in studies of prestige drama such as the BBC's *Play for Today* anthology of authored dramas (1974-80), and the focus on genre, format and reception that has been important in studies of popular television drama. But since the programmes were sometimes extensively reshaped by the contributions of directors and script-editors for example, we also needed to detail the contexts in which they were made and watched. The historical and textual study centred on an author had to engage in academic and theoretical debates about methodology and emphasis. A chronological and individual

focus on Nation's career at the beginning contrasts with later parts of the book in which we address selected programmes scripted or devised by Nation, focusing on the meanings which critical analysis, and actual or possible viewers, may derive from them.  In other words, the exemplarity of programmes was diffracted by questions of chronology, textual propriety, production, reception, intertextuality and intermediality that challenged the apparent ease of an author-based and programme-based study.

This problem of justification, which is addressed by identifying the imagined interests of different readers and audiences, is markedly different from the assumptions about the progressive aesthetic education offered by television drama and the study of it in earlier decades.  As well as arguing that television dramas might have an inherent aesthetic quality, writing and teaching since the 1970s in Britain were based on the assumption that the political education offered by television drama and its study were their own justification.  This tended to privilege realist and contemporary programmes whose 'message' (whether in their theme or their form) was in itself of pedagogical importance. The programmes chosen for study were often legitimated as 'serious' or 'progressive', and realist in the sense that their version of the real could be represented as contradictory, and thus the viewing subject, whether 'ordinary viewer' or student, would be pushed towards change.  But this position neglects the context's influence on the ways the text is received, whether in a schedule, a course of study, or in the pages of an academic publication, at a particular historical moment and in a particular social context. For an apparently closed naturalist text can acquire political importance because of the ways it fits into a social debate, for example.  This crucial contribution of contextual

framing to meaning reveals that there is no 'good form' or 'bad form' in television drama or in the processes of its teaching and in writing about it.

Access and exemplarity

An easy answer to hostile demands to justify writing about the history of British television drama is to say that such studies are important to teach current students about television of the past, to inform their understanding of the present. The aim here is to provide students new to the study of television history with access both to accounts of the past in British television drama but also access to the programmes themselves and historiographic resources (other than the programmes) that provide context and significance. I have just written a course text on television studies which includes a chapter on television history (Bignell 2004, pp.35-59). When the original proposal was being evaluated by anonymous readers, one of them commented that the chapter on history was unnecessary, and students should be reading only about recent television that they will recognise. I disagreed strongly with this view, and the book does still contain the chapter. But one of the tasks in writing it was to refer as much as possible to programmes that could plausibly be seen and studied. The canon is produced as much by access as by evaluation, and these are intertwined. So it has become almost compulsory to study *Cathy Come Home* for example, since it is the most repeated single play in British television history and therefore the most accessible, and it is regarded both inside and outside academia as formally and politically significant.

However, working on publications that seek to make television historiography and theory accessible has to be done at least alongside more scholarly work aimed at

fellow academics and which looks respectable to people outside the field.  I have been advised by senior figures at my own institution and elsewhere that if I want to advance my career I should stop writing texts aimed at student readers, because they are not rated highly enough in the national assessment that measures British universities' research excellence every few years.  The political economy of government accountability mechanisms for academics leads to pressures within academia not to help form accounts of the field that will define it for students.  A difference of constituency is produced between undergraduate work on television, and its canon, and research and canons produced at more specialised levels of the profession. In relation to published research on television drama, however, there are constraints on what researchers can bring to the public domain because of the political economy of academic publishing. The expansion of the teaching of television has led to a proliferation of books that discuss and summarise existing research (including my own, Bignell 2004), but the unpredictability and risk for publishers in presenting new research in specialist areas of the field has made it increasingly difficult for authors to gain contracts for new scholarly studies. This is exacerbated by the largely national character of television drama production and broadcasting, despite the global television economy of import and export of programmes and programme formats, and there is consequently a demand that academic work should have trans-national or cross-market appeal to the general reader or to television fans. Although there are now more academic journals with a remit to publish new television scholarship, and web-based publication also offers new possibilities for dissemination, academic institutions still expect university staff to centre their research activity on conventional paper publication and to give priority to the writing of books. This picture is

a depressing one, and one that does not bode well for the creation of new ideas that texts for students can develop and explain.

This is one reason to question how an emerging constituency of television historians could be generated to work on the canon, but there are also serious problems of evidence that their work would involve. There are some recent efforts to bring out more DVDs and videos of past television, and collections grow in academic departments in the UK as the recently-created digital television channel BBC4 re-screens old programmes. But the decisions made by broadcasters about which programmes to make available depend on a range of factors to do with assumed audience interest, among which intrinsic quality and canonicity are only a factor. The problem of how to clear rights to programmes whose original contracts did not allow repeats is significant, since broadcasters cannot afford the time and effort needed to find original contributors and secure their agreement. The canon is obviously shaped to a large degree by access to copies of programmes as broadcast, many of which were made on re-useable videotape in Britain, especially in the 1960-70 period, and were wiped.

Similar problems affect the scholarly study of television documentation. Television historians need to know what is in the archives so we can bid for funding to study it. There are no plans to make broadcasters' and rights-holders' catalogues accessible, and we have to think up a plan of work without being sure that the material is there. My recent work on Terry Nation's writing for television included detailed analysis of the aesthetics and forms of the programmes Nation wrote in their screened forms, since readers would be able to view these programmes on video or DVD. But another reason for focusing on Nation's popular science fiction work for the BBC was that

archives in commercial companies would be much harder to access, and probably less detailed and complete. Access and range of documents conditions the forms and emphases of television historiography. Evidence from production files in BBC Written Archives was absolutely essential to the research on Terry Nation, and we could not have undertaken it otherwise. Archive material shaped the project's conception and realisation, and contributed to the already greater depth of scholarship on BBC history than that of other UK broadcasters.

Arguments for a reflexive practice

The legitimacy of practicing television historiography and theory derives from the institutional, ideological and cultural legitimacy attributed to different kinds of research method and research topic. The kinds of critical investigation within television studies are necessarily eclectic, and their epistemological probity is open to attack unless their heterogeneity is sanctioned by rigorous investigation into the relationship between the different epistemic regimes the work involves. Television study has a difficult position within the humanities field because television is popular, everyone knows something about it, and it is associated with leisure and private space. Since research practice is in itself internally differentiated, discontinuous, and draws together different claims to legitimacy, it is necessary to develop a discursive practice that reflects this. Television historiography and theory should be reflexive and situated rhetorical practices, which can be capable of at least explaining, if not translating, their insights into discourses that are comprehensible to different audiences, including students but also fans and broader publics. If television programmes, archival documents, or audience practices for example

are separated by television theory from the context of their production as an example, and from an awareness of the subject-positions of theoretical discourses discussing them, this runs the risk of fetishizing them as apparently unitary and free-standing objects. Rather than assuming that approaches to television history are neutral tools, the eclectic use of different methodologies should remind readers and students that critical approaches shape the canons they produce. This means taking account of the political economy of academic publishing and research funding, intended readerships and student consistuencies, competing historiographic methodologies, and access to materials. It is this analytical self-consciousness that marks the most recent work in the field (for example, Bignell and Lacey 2005, Cooke 2003, Hilmes 2003). A reflexive approach raises questions of methodology that necessarily but sometimes unconsciously energise Television Studies, for the construction of histories of television produces necessary boundaries which are determined by pragmatic factors (such as programmes' availability or length) as well as critical ones.

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