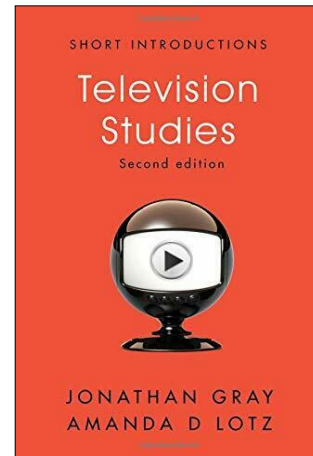


Jonathan Gray and Amanda D. Lotz, **Television Studies (Short Introductions), Second Edition**, Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2019, 188 pp., \$24.99 (paperback).

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The reviewer on the book jacket describes this book as “a landmark guide” and “a must read for students and scholars alike,” and I agree with that assessment. *Television Studies* provides an effective introductory text to television research from its infancy to today. As described by authors Jonathan Gray and Amanda D. Lotz, the book’s purpose—to present “an in-depth look at how an approach recognized as ‘television studies’ developed” along with a summary of “the primary areas [this approach] has examined”—has been met fully (p. 5). The authors include all essential studies and other works by key scholars to provide a well-rounded introduction to the field. The notes for each chapter and extensive references permit the reader to locate all the mentioned works easily should they seek them out as primary sources.



Besides the traditional introductory and concluding chapters, the book is split into four chapters. In their one-word titles, the first three chapters represent the dynamic triangle, also known as the media triangle. No TV programs, industry or audiences exist in a vacuum. Programs (in this case, TV shows) are consumed by audiences. Their response to said programs influences the industry’s decision on current and future programming. Correspondingly, the first three chapters are labeled “Programs,” “Audiences,” and “Industries.” The fourth chapter provides further connections between the first three entities, and is therefore appropriately titled “Contexts.” Historical context, such as war, impacts what an industry produces, how a text speaks to its audience, and how an audience responds to it. Although the rationale of chapter 4 is explained explicitly to the readers, it may be helpful to explain the labeling of the first three chapters as well to the readers. Currently, it is left to the reader to realize that the chapter titles represent the media triangle. Student readers especially may overlook this significant piece of guidance. [In chapter 4, the authors label the media triangle “the holy trinity,” but at that point readers likely already read the previous three chapters, as the book chapters are structured to be read sequentially (p. 124).]

This book is suitable for advanced undergraduate courses, such as a research methods course or a senior capstone course. This may sound contradictory to the previous assertion that this is an introductory text, but I would use the book for an advanced course to prepare students for writing an honors thesis, or something similar, who are conducting some original research of their own. This book can be used both as an introductory text and a refresher for advanced students. It provides summary overviews of the various approaches, such as uses and gratifications (pp. 65–66), that students would have studied in their prior classes. The book provides appropriate review, followed by summary examples of key studies—the approaches and findings. This would give students some insight into the possibilities of research they could conduct and what

the strengths and weaknesses of each approach are. The references and chapter notes would permit them to read sources in more detail.

The main limitation of the book is that the summaries of studies are extremely brief and ultimately abstract. It is this limitation that results in not recommending the book for a lower-level course, where students are introduced to concepts for the first time. In such a course, a text with extensive examples would be more beneficial to help the students walk through a step-by-step analysis to illustrate the concept or approach being studied. For example, *Television Studies* provides a summary of a *mise-en-scène* analysis of the TV shows *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver* in relation to gender representation (p. 50). The conclusion of the study is that women were being represented as homemakers in a "suburban housing development and the consumer product industry at the time" (p. 50). On the one hand, no specific *mise-en-scène* example is given that would permit the reader to get some understanding as to how the conclusion was reached. Such a summary means very little to someone who does not know the show or how to conduct such an analysis. On the other hand, providing such details for every single study in this book would lengthen this text significantly. Instead, providing the complete references permits readers to seek out more information should they desire to do so.

The main strength of *Television Studies* is that it provides a large amount of summary texts, including trajectories of a particular subfocus, over time. For instance, feminism is covered all the way from shows like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* to *Sex and the City* (pp. 50–51). The former show was on the air in the 1970s, while the latter was a successful TV program in the late 1990s to early 2000s. Providing summaries of studies covering different decades illustrates to readers how culture and ideology have evolved over time. It is also these kinds of subfoci (such as feminism, nation and class status, race and ethnicity, and politics) that lend themselves to spark ideas for senior-level undergraduate research projects.

Additional aspects that make this book ideal for student readers are the language choice and the addition of essential background context. For instance, the authors state that "television is a messy business" (p. 31). This makes the text approachable and engaging for student readers. Similarly, essential background information is provided that readers may otherwise not consider. For instance, Gray and Lotz add a discussion of technical constraints that hindered textual analysis before VHS recording devices (p. 32). Younger readers may not think of the technological revolution in which they grew up or that occurred even before their childhood. In this case, only once shows could be recorded and rewatched could textual analysis thrive.

Besides the tone that is suitable for student readers, the explanation of terminology is equally effective. As a vocabulary example, the authors explain the difference between the meanings of the words "work" and "text" in the context of scholarly studies (p. 46). Readers understand that a word can have multiple meanings (polysemy) but note that it has a singular meaning within a specific discipline. Discussing Roland Barthes's contributions, the reader learns that within the context of media studies, a "work" is the piece that the producer creates, whereas a "text" is the piece that the consumer reads/watches and brings to life in their own minds (p. 46). Ultimately, the piece remains the same, but the producer does not have control over the interpretations the consumer forms. One explanation that I found particularly useful is the emphasis that the word "critical" does not mean negative (p. 48). Rather, in this kind of research, "critical" means that we are

searching for a deeper meaning. Students, in particular, interpret "critical" to mean problematic and to point out negative aspects of the subject under discussion.

The main reason that this book should be a part of any library on media studies is because the authors include every single important scholar and study. As such, it is also a valuable book for scholars and teachers. In chapter 1, "Programs," when looking at television studies from the program's perspective, Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1972) is simplified to a beginner level (p. 40). In chapter 2, "Audiences," when discussing "fan studies," Henry Jenkins' (1992) work *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* is listed as one of the first key scholars and resources (p. 73). In chapter 3, "Industries," Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's 1940's essay *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* introduces readers to the Frankfurt School and how these scholars considered the danger of mass media on culture, of culture becoming an industry (pp. 102–103). I was familiar with approximately 75% of the referenced studies and texts and could not think of one text that I felt should have been mentioned but was missing. Scholars can use this book effectively in an encyclopedia manner, quickly identifying which key texts should be considered when covering a particular concept, when, for instance, preparing a new teaching module or when beginning a new research endeavor in the area themselves.

Considering the amount of references the authors make to meet the goal of their book, it reads a little bit like an encyclopedia of TV (and related media) studies. This limited formatting is considered to be a significant shortcoming of the book. Overall, the book presents approximately 150 pages of dense text, page by page, paragraph by paragraph. No illustrations are provided. Key terms are not bolded. This hinders engagement and may lead to a feeling of being overwhelmed, especially for a student reader. While the index is effective in guiding a reader to a particular term, study, or TV show by indicating the pages where the relevant item is being discussed, when looking at such a page, one has to skim the dense paragraphs to find the respective spot. It may be useful to bold key terms, put definitions in separate boxes to liven up the pages, and overall make the pages more engaging and memorable, in particular for visual learners.

The conclusion (pp. 140–144) contextualizes the field of television studies within the development of technology and discusses its changes. The authors conclude that the research (discussed in this book) remains as valuable as ever, and I wholeheartedly agree. Future studies focusing on online streaming services or other such modes of bringing programs to audiences are building on existing studies that began with traditional television. *Television Studies* is a part of media studies and its content is still valuable, even as the divisions between the traditional forms of film, television, and radio are—or even have already been—erased.

References

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