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**ABSTRACT**

Although television is highly dependent on language and semiotic analysis, its form can best be analyzed through the structural notion of transformation. The critic's task becomes the articulation of structural laws intrinsic to television. One such law has to do with how television structures time. Television programming transforms action into half-hour or hour-long episodes that can continue over several nights, weeks, months or years, sometimes in a simple sequence of recurrent patterns, sometimes incrementally, and sometimes even by repeating individual segments. The structural coherence of the individual episodes allows the audience closure, the ability to put together the parts of a greater whole. Instead of a compression, in a literary sense, of character development, usually unfolding over a period of two hours, serialization demands repetition and expansion. It diminishes the need for resolution and shifts the emphasis to process. The use of temporal structure also helps build a web of connections that enlarges and complicates characters and allows for sustained thematic treatment. Given the current linguistic bias in semiotics, such considerations of television's aesthetic structure would most likely slip through the semiologist's analytic net. Structuralism as a methodological tool, therefore, must be rescued from the semiologists if it is going to be useful in television criticism. (HOD)

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A STRUCTURALIST APPROACH TO TELEVISION CRITICISM

PRESENTED TO

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November 11, 1983

Washington, D.C.

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Almost ten years ago, Horace Newcombe ended his book, TV: The Most Popular Art, by proclaiming that it was no longer possible to ignore the aesthetic structure of television. "TV is America's most popular art," he said. "Its artistic function can only grow and mature, and as it does, so must its popularity."<sup>1</sup>

It would be nice to report that television scholars had taken Newcombe's prognostication to heart and have been busy mining the hills of television art ever since, but that is decidedly not the case. The lure of television continues to lie in its popularity, and, by extension, its effects, rather than in its artistic pretensions. Television criticism remains a neglected pursuit.

What minor excavations have been made to establish a theoretical basis for television criticism have been made under the auspices of semiology. Yet semiology remains preoccupied with the architecture of meaning in general. For example, in Media Analysis Techniques, his text for students of criticism, Arthur Asa Berger sets forth semiology as one of four critical perspectives useful in the examination of mass media.<sup>2</sup> Valuable as Berger's book may be, its concerns have less to do with the specific perimeters of television than with mass media in general, as his choice of topics for analysis demonstrates: fashion advertising, all-news radio, football and an Agatha Christie mystery.

The British scholars John Fiske and John Hartley apply the tools of semiotic analysis to both British and American television programming more extensively, and with some attention to the distinctive elements of television as a medium. Their work

provides an antidote to social impact perspectives on violence with its argument about television violence's essentially symbolic function. Television viewers do not normally confuse televised violence with real violence, they suggest, because television violence operates within a mythic structure in which the deepest concern is the dominance of one social role over another. Violence on television, they say, is "...a semiotic category. It is a vehicle through which meanings are transferred: one technically suited to the television medium with visual, active face-to-face (or fist-to-fist) contact that fills the optimum mid-shot/close-up range of the television camera frame."<sup>3</sup> Critical analysis of this sort is what rescues television criticism from the clutches of the anecdotists and the reviewers, keeping those who aspire to the role of critic from giving up in despair.

But semiology for the most part treats television as interchangeable with any other mass medium. Umberto Eco, concentrating on the role industrialization plays as the primary unifier in mass communication, discounts outright the contribution of the individual medium. He proposes that the "differences in nature and effect between the various means of communication (movie, newspaper, television or comic strips) fade into the background compared with the emergence of common structures and effects."<sup>4</sup> All too often even those common structures and effects are submerged in the preoccupations of linguistics. Roland Barthes goes so far as to state in Elements of Semiology that "linguistics is not a part of the general science of signs, even a privileged part, it is semiology which is a part of linguistics: to be precise, it is that part covering the great signifying unities of discourse."<sup>5</sup> Once semiology becomes a subcategory of linguistics, the television critic is confined to

investigations regarding language and biased towards methods of a literary sort. In each case, a great deal of the substance of television is neglected.

In sum, those whose interest is the formal and aesthetic properties unique to a particular mass medium like television will not find much that is directly useful in semiology. At its worst, semiology is clotted with arcane linguistic terminology, becoming little more than an elaborate, all-too-often clumsy rephrasing of the obvious. Even at its best, it is not interested in making judgments or distinctions between good signs and bad signs. It is limited as a method of inquiry to the "decoding" of meaning in complex phenomena.

Television, without doubt, is highly dependent on language and on semiotic analysis, even when Barthes' narrow, purely linguistic definition is accepted, and semiology can be quite valuable when it addresses that dimension of the medium. The work of Christian Metz<sup>6</sup> and Peter Wollen<sup>7</sup> in film demonstrates the potential of semiotic analysis in exploring those dimensions of a visual medium which are not strictly linguistic. But the ultimate goal of the semiotician remains not to reach a better understanding of the medium; it is rather to reach a greater appreciation of the science of signs.

Semioticians often incorporate structuralist methods in their work. In this way, the structuralist perspective becomes an explanatory tool for the larger concerns of signification which cross many fields, from anthropology and sociology, to psychoanalysis and stylistics, to use Barthes' catalogue. In this sense, structuralism as a method serves as the grand unifier. Much like

systems theory, its value at this level has been to bring together data from disparate and complex sources under the same theoretical umbrella.

But structuralism can also serve quite well as a tool of inquiry for a narrower concern, the aesthetic structure of television. The rationale for assigning priority to the exploration<sup>of</sup> television's aesthetic structure is clear. It becomes difficult to proceed in any type of critical analysis of television when its form has not been examined systemically from a coherent theoretical perspective. Semiology so far has led primarily to theoretical concerns which exist beyond the matter of what shape television as a particular medium takes. Yet in the process of addressing more abstract semiotic matters, Barthes himself implies the importance of the medium--in this case film--in his essay, "The Third Meaning."

Here he identifies a level of meaning beyond the informational and the symbolic in the following way:

As for the other meaning, the third, the one 'too many', the supplement that my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and elusive, I propose to call it the obtuse meaning.<sup>8</sup>

He discovers this third level of meaning in Eisenstein's film, Potemkin, and he says, "the third meaning structures the film differently--at least in SME--subverting the story and for this reason, perhaps, it is at the level of the third meaning, and at that level alone that the 'filmic' finally emerges."<sup>9</sup> Barthes' third meaning is clearly extra linguistic. As such, it leads away from semiotic concerns as Barthes has defined them and potentially towards matters of artistic structure.

Even those critics who have addressed the matter of television's aesthetic structure have tended to confuse it with other media like film, theatre or literature. When critics attempt to analyze television using the analytical tools conventional to other media, television usually comes off as a derivative, inferior product. Treated like film, television becomes fuzzy-pictured and reductive. As theatre, it lacks compression and purity. As literature, it is baldly commercial, embarrassingly shallow and riddled by stereotypes.

Such confusions are not hard to understand since criticism by tradition is primarily literary, suited to analysis of the aesthetic structures of literature, film and theatre, but not suited to analysis of a radically different aesthetic structure like television. Structuralism can help the critic avoid the pitfalls of analyzing television by literary standards. In particular, the structuralist notion of transformation as developed by Claude Levi-Strauss and Jean Piaget can be of value in the analysis of television form.

In "Four Winnebago Myths: A Structural Sketch," Levi-Strauss illustrates how the structuralist principle of transformation operates.<sup>10</sup> Working from a grouping of four myths by another anthropologist, Paul Radin, Levi-Strauss reveals the similarities of structure despite the considerable deviation of one of the myths in content, style and structure from the other three. He proposes that the connection between conscious content in a myth and its meaning at an unconscious level is not necessarily reflective, but inverted by means of transformation. Levi-Strauss uncovers the

mechanics of this particular transformation by applying mathematical logic.

Because the subject at hand is anthropological, it might seem more suitable to have used techniques conventional to that discipline, but Levi-Strauss, lacking the prevailing prejudice against primitive societies as pre-logical, saw no heresy in ignoring accepted anthropological or historical precepts. He observes that understanding apparently incongruous components of a structure can be accomplished most easily by re-organizing those components, in this case, into a dichotomous construct of correlations and oppositions, as well as by ordering them on a common scale. In other words, he affirms the value of mathematical tools as a way to understand the mechanics of transformation in this context.

Jean Piaget states that "indeed, all known structures-- from mathematical groups to kinship systems--are, without exception, systems of transformation."<sup>11</sup> He further states that "If the character of structured wholes depends on their laws of composition, these laws must of their very nature be structuring: it is the constant duality, or bipolarity, of always being simultaneously structuring and structured that accounts for the success of the notion of law or rule employed by structuralists."<sup>12</sup> Transformation, then, is the modus operandi of structure, and uncovering its dynamics--as Levi-Strauss did in the case of Winnebago myth--is the key to an understanding of the relationships in structured wholes.

It is important to keep in mind that structural relationships are multi-dimensional, consisting at the very least not only of the elements of the structure but being the nexus of surface and

subsurface. Saussure's langue-parole distinction provides a cautionary illustration of Piaget's precept about the duality of structural laws. The difficulty in comprehending Saussure's langue-parole distinction lies in the challenge it requires to avoid the temptation of focusing on langue and parole as separate entities. That, indeed, is the potential pitfall of all dichotomic processes. The linear nature of language itself makes for this temptation, as, for example, we see in Barthes' discussion of the two terms in Elements of Semiology.

Barthes presents langue in one paragraph, then follows with parole in another, and, finally, "runs after" in a third paragraph to remind us that "each of these two terms of course achieves its full definition only in the dialectical process which unites one with the other: there is no language without speech, and no speech outside of language."<sup>13</sup> Hardly easy to keep in mind when presented in that langue, which belies the parole.

The notion of transformation becomes helpful in the analysis of television programming because it allows the critic to look beyond the necessary borrowing of the medium from other media and to see how television develops its own, distinct aesthetic structure. The critic's task becomes the articulation of the structural laws or rules intrinsic to television. One such law has to do with how television structures time, and it provides a good illustration of how structuralism can be used in television criticism.

Newcombe demonstrated what Levi-Strauss called flair, the intuitive understanding of a structural transformation when he pointed out how important it is to take into account television

programming's serial structure. Writing in 1974, Newcombe discusses serialization primarily as a potential attribute, suggesting that "With the exception of soap operas, television has not realized that the regular and repeated appearance of a continuing group of characters is one of its strongest techniques for the development of rich and textured dramatic presentations."<sup>14</sup> In fact, television has moved consistently away from the theatrical and cinematic conventions governing time as a structural law, and television programming becomes most inherently televisual when it expands rather than compresses time, as it does in the case of serialization. Serialization is just one aspect of the structural law of temporal expansion in television, and it is a law that has major ramifications.

Since the time of Aristotle's prescription for unity of action --and by the sixteenth century dramatic unity reached the extreme requirement of confinement to one day (and one place)--compression has been the temporal law in theatre and, more recently, film. Narrative compression dictates the convention of a two to three hour time frame as the proper amount of time needed to present a single, unified action in which characters grow and come to some recognition about themselves, providing the audience with a satisfying aesthetic experience. Alternatively in drama and film, whole lives can be condensed into a series of scenes, or action can be constructed through the ellipsis of flashbacks and flashforwards, or the summaries of an omniscient narrator. The resulting intensity of compression has always been highly valued in theatre and film.

Television very quickly developed its own temporal law. Unlike film or theatre, a television program is not typically an event the viewer attends and participates in collectively.

Instead, it has been incorporated into the home and is available, at least in the abstract, on a 24-hour basis. It is most reasonable for such a medium to transform action into half-hour or hour-long episodes which can continue over several nights, several weeks, months or years, sometimes in a simple sequence of recurrent patterns, sometimes incrementally, and sometimes even by repeating individual segments. By literary standards, such a temporal structure is inadequate, but not when it is understood as the manifestation of a structural law applicable to television. True, during the "Golden Age" of the fifties, live, original televised drama appeared using the more theatrical two-hour time frame, but the nomenclature "televised drama" is appropriate because television's more typical time frame is expansive: one half or one hour installments over an extended period. It is quite easy to see why television would develop such a temporal law as a means of punctuating what is a continuous flow of programming.

Critics often try to approach a television series by examining a single half-hour episode. By doing that, they invariably ended up committing a "dramatic" fallacy by attempting to judge the program in terms of the wrong medium. The individual episodes are not simply repetitive. They are coherent and related at a structural level, allowing the audience closure: the ability to put together the parts of a greater whole. It is possible to find evidence for television's temporal law in operation in some of the medium's earliest programming. Lucy Ricardo of I Love Lucy illustrates the impact of television's temporal structure on character.

In a program like I Love Lucy, character acquires depth over time because the audience sees Lucy in a variety of minor

actions which are transformational. In terms of literary character analysis, Lucy appears to be a rather stereotypical comic type. The same pattern recurs in each half-hour segment: Lucy gets herself in trouble and then out of it. When Ricky seems to know all the answers<sup>w</sup> to a radio quiz show, Lucy hatches a scheme to get them both on the show. Unbeknownst to her, Ricky has already heard the answers at work because the show was a delayed broadcast. In reality, Ricky isn't the "overgrown Cuban quiz kid" that Lucy imagines he is. Once learning that, Lucy devises a system of clues to help Ricky answer the questions when they appear as contestants on the show.

The situation provides numerous opportunities for sight gags and verbal puns when Lucy goes through contortions to see the answers and then give Ricky clues. Within the framework of the program, Lucy demonstrates prodigious if misguided ingenuity. There is no particular evidence of growth or depth in her character in the literary sense. Yet she is a memorable character. There is a fascination to watching her antics which is not based simply on their ridiculousness.

Indeed, she is memorable because of the consistency of her personality. The serial nature of the program, in which Lucy gets herself in and out of such a dilemma every week, establishes a unique structure with its own values: a transformation takes place. Instead of the compression, in a literary sense, of character development, which unfolds over a period, usually of two hours, serialization demands repetition and expansion. Instead of a single, unified action, there is a seemingly infinite variety of minor actions to which Lucy must respond. Her character gains dimension because of the consistency with which she responds--in structuralist terms,

a form of self regulation.

No single situation carries the weight or profundity of a Falstaff's antics or a Tartuffe's deceptions. These situations are the same, forgettable episodes that any ordinary individual is confronted with. They loom large in one's life for the moment and then recede. Their value lies in the way they demonstrate Lucy's energy and ability to survive. The occasion does not present itself for Lucy to come to some lasting recognition about her behavior because the scale of events that are presented renders such a recognition inappropriate. What is exceptional about Lucy's character is that, given her ordinariness, she sustains her vitality and good humor week after week, month after month. In the topical tradition of comedy, Lucy's sisyphean struggle to win recognition for her talent, energy and ingenuity --and break into show business--reflects the general status of women in the fifties.

In a sixties situation comedy, another popular heroine, Samantha of Bewitched, embodies a very different topical message about women. Samantha is a housewife like Lucy, but she has magical powers. She doesn't usually get into trouble herself--her relatives cause most of the problems--but she always uses her powers as a witch to make everything come out all right, usually operating behind the scenes. As improbable as the notion of witchcraft is, Bewitched manages to convey a sense of the changing if still undefined role of women. In contrast, Mary in The Mary Tyler Moore Show in the seventies moves into the marketplace, a little wistfully, all by herself. She loses some of the power that Samantha has, but gains a great deal of humanity. Neither of

these characters really comes into focus in a single episode, but each does over a season, or several seasons. In Samantha's case, magical powers become a reification of a complex social concern which is explored as she struggles to master her strange and sometimes unruly gift. In Mary's case, such reification is no longer necessary, and the weekly spectacle becomes Mary's struggle to adjust to what is in effect a new social role.

The temporal law of television can also be used to pinpoint flaws in a television series. McHale's Navy was much poorer television than the three situation comedies just mentioned because it remains an aggregate of isolated episodes. In McHale's Navy, the characters exist essentially outside of time. Serialization works best when it capitalizes on the changes which occur naturally to characters as people: Lucy Ricardo's pregnancy; Rhoda Morganstern's loss of weight; the gradual maturing of Ann Romano's teenaged daughters. In McHale's Navy, McHale, Binghamton, and the crew are no different after three years in the Pacific than they were at the onset. Missing is the sense of accumulated experience that we have even in as early a show as I Love Lucy, an accumulation which enriches the characters even when it does not change them in essential ways.

In part, the weaknesses of McHale's Navy may be due to the way that the premise of the show, based on an event that actually took place, was established. Every school child studies the major battles, treaties, and bombings of World War II, even in as remote an arena as the South Pacific. These events have an existence which cannot be suspended simply for the benefit of television situation comedy. The audience always knew that in reality, World

War II came to an end, as it never did in McHale's Navy. It could be countered that the critical and popular success of M. A.S.H. in the seventies refutes such an argument, but the Korean War represents a very different kind of arena. With issues less clearly defined, the Korean War represents the beginnings of a view of war less as a traditionally dramatic event, but as a state of mind, which <sup>eventually</sup> is typified by the Vietnam experience. Certainly in the case of M.A.S.H., war becomes a state of mind and the focus of the satire, rather than the simple dramatic backdrop it serves as in McHale's Navy, Hogan's Heroes and Broadside, along with the many other World War II military situation comedies which proliferated in the sixties. Because the use of time as a structuring device in television programming is very different from its use in the literary tradition, the telescoping effect of television time makes it very difficult to use real events in the manner that they were employed in McHale's Navy without diluting the credibility of a given program.

In its early days, television programming used the temporal law of structure to expand character over time, but not to expand action. Action tended at first to be contained within individual episodes, except in the case of fortuitous events like Lucille Ball's pregnancy. That changed as programming matured, and All in the Family provides a good illustration of some of the ways in which temporal expansion can be exploited to enrich action. The focus of one episode becomes Edith's attempt to put Archie on a diet. In subsequent episodes, the focus of the plots shifts, but Archie's dieting attempts remain incidental, a reminder that such efforts must be sustained over time.

Lear exploits television's temporal structure in another way by building one action onto another. During the first season of All in the Family, Gloria becomes pregnant. Much of the program concentrates on how Archie reacts to the idea of becoming a grandfather, until Gloria suffers a miscarriage. In an episode aired during the 1974-1975 season, Mike announces that he and Gloria have decided against having children. Then in the 1975-1976 season, Gloria becomes pregnant, and her and Mike's new son provides the focus for numerous episodes in subsequent seasons. In this way, the addition of little Joey to the Bunker-Stivic family is built on a past history of incidents and attitudes by the various members of the family. Action has thereby acquired an integrity and meaning which it would not otherwise have. Growth and change are thus represented less with the suddenness of conventional dramatic structure, and more realistically with the gradualness and unevenness of experience.

The notion of isolated segments of time in which character and action unfold, which television programming relied on initially, is most directly exploited by Lear with the extension of a single plot over two or even three weeks. For example, when Archie goes to Buffalo to a union convention, Edith learns that he has never arrived. By the next week and episode, Archie is still missing, and Edith begins to suspect that he has run off with another woman. It is not until the third week--and episode--that we learn that Archie has ended up at the wrong convention in Buffalo.

The expansion of time on television is not simply progressive. The fact that the characters have a history is also extended into action and incorporated into the program, as All in the Family

illustrates. In a two-episode sequence, Michael and Gloria's wedding is presented in a flashback, much as a family might reminisce about important events in its past. The use of temporal structure in these ways builds a web of connections which enlarges and complicates the characters and allows for sustained thematic treatment.

The development of one such theme in All in the Family comes from Archie's opinions on the matter of "black" vs. "white" blood. The subject is first treated during the initial season, when Mike bullies Archie into donating blood and Archie insists that there's a difference between "black" and "white" blood. Several seasons later, Archie goes into the hospital for a gallstone operation and is mortified to learn that the only blood available for his transfusion is that of a black doctor. A year later, Archie inadvertently joins the Ku Klux Klan. When he discovers they want him to help burn a cross on Mike's and Gloria's front lawn, he extricates himself by claiming to have black blood and threatening to call on his black "brothers" for help. Through the repeated treatment of Archie's attitude toward "black" blood, what could have been a rather shallow attempt to anatomize prejudice acquires depth.

When Archie first claims that there is a difference between "black" and "white" blood, his argument seems like just another inane and empty justification of racial prejudice. There are no particular consequences to his opinion. Then when he is confronted with the need for a transfusion, he must examine his prejudice more closely. While he doesn't relinquish his bias, he must accept it in a different light. The issue finally comes full circle when it is no longer simply a matter of his having tainted blood,

but he must face head on the ramifications of the racial prejudice which inspires it. When it is a member of his own family who is the object of a Ku Klux Klan attack, Archie must make a choice. His bigotry recedes before familial loyalty, and he uses his "black" blood as an excuse to get him out of an intolerable situation.

No heroic figure in the literary sense, Archie does not come to a sudden dramatic recognition of the error of his ways, but his character has grown. The choice he has made reveals a great deal about him. He is a vital and intensely human figure. Television's temporal law establishes a time frame which is much closer to real experience than literary conventions. Just as the implications of choices and opinions in our own lives unfold in most cases over an extended period of time, so do they in Archie's and Edith's lives. Their weekly presence in our lives not only gives their personalities a dimension that would not be possible otherwise; it allows us to consider and integrate their actions. It is not a literary approach to meaning; it is televisual, a rearrangement of the relationship between fiction and reality in a manner unique to television.

To use Piaget's structuralist terminology, the wholeness of time as a structural element of television and its self-regulation can be demonstrated by the fact that although producers have experimented with a variety of formats (15 minutes, 1½ hours, 2½ hours, alternate weeks, 8 weeks) over the past 35 years, the half-hour and hour formats continue to dominate in contrast to the two-three hour theatrical and cinematic convention in the literary tradition. This is because audiences watch a show over a

greatly expanded--by literary standards--period of time. One episode does not a series make, and reruns allow the audience to catch up on the episodes they have missed or relish what they've already seen once and enjoyed.

I Love Lucy failed when it tried to become a once-a-month series of hour-long shows after many years in a half-hour format. The NBC Mystery Theater, rotating four separate crime shows (McMillan and Wife, Columbo, McCloud, along with a series of less successful fourths) worked despite its scheduling--which was not good television since it went too far beyond the temporal constraints of television structure--because of the high quality of its scripts and acting. Still another temporal constraint of television structure is demonstrated by the fact that the fate of all but the most popular programs which get moved around in the schedule is cancellation. Even a high calibre program like St. Elsewhere almost fell prey to the network ax because it could not compete with the popular detective drama, Hart to Hart. This provides an example of where matters regarding the temporal law of television structure begin to meld into matters of program flow--ultimately a separate structural concern.

The second most characteristic television time format, the miniseries, capitalizes on two of the same structural values as conventional series regarding time: serialization and some degree of repetition. Miniseries like Shogun and The Winds of War develop action and character which cannot be condensed into a literary format. The miniseries' closest theatrical counterpart is Shakespearean history play cycles; its closest cinematic relative, sequels and the television-influenced series like Star

Wars. In contrast, conventional movies remain a derivative form on television in terms of its temporal structure, as witnessed by the difficulty of making successful made-for-tv movies. That difficulty is more than just a matter of lack of money and bad writing. It reflects the more literary structure of film, which requires a temporal compression that, while it is possible and even successful on television, is nevertheless forced, like the rhymed verse that apes poetry.

Because of the temporal law governing the structure of television, television plot is far more vulnerable to the vagaries of contract disputes and actors' illnesses, necessitating in the case of soap operas an elaborate convention of convenient illnesses or deaths, twin siblings and business trips to explain the disappearance and potential reappearance of actors. In prime time, Chrissy of Three's Company visited her mother indefinitely, but Henry Blake of M.A.S.H. died dramatically in a plane crash. Some of the plot conventions necessitated by television's temporal structure are reminiscent of the changelings, twins and women disguised as men of Shakespearean romantic comedy. While I have treated the temporal structure of television primarily in terms of character and plot, it also transforms setting by requiring greater simplicity and verisimilitude, and by generating the kind of intense audience attachment reflected by the apotheosis of Archie Bunker's chair to museum piece in the Smithsonian.

The most sophisticated use of television's temporal structure to date came in the first season of Hill Street Blues, where plot was often extended without resolution over several weeks in the fashion of soap operas, something just experimented with in All in the Family.

Such extenuations, in the case of a weekly series, are a much riskier innovation, but television's temporal structure assumes that the audience may miss part of the action or even its resolution. The aesthetic message is that action, like life, often has no satisfying resolution, or that we miss what resolution there is-- and have to wait for it on television in a rerun. Hill Street Blues has modified itself in response to perceived audience dissatisfaction with its often unresolved plots, but the structural principle remains sound: serialization on television diminishes the need for resolution and shifts the emphasis to process.

Such considerations as these, which are basic to an understanding of television's aesthetic structure would most likely slip through the analytic net of the semiologist because of the current linguistic bias of that method and its subsequent loss of interest in structure and form. It is for this reason that structuralism as a methodological tool must be rescued from the semiologists if it is going to be useful in television criticism. Television is a truly revolutionary medium, and the examination of its radical nature should not be left exclusively to the impact and effects studies of the social scientists.

When New Yorker critic Michael Arlen began his collection of essays on television, The View from Highway One, in 1976 by saying

the content of American television is for the most part so meretricious and second-rate that it is nearly impossible to deal with on any other basis than that of the bare-bones informational review in the daily newspaper 15

he was writing as a literary critic sizing up enemy territory, not as a true television critic. The television critic who is armed with structural analysis can generate a genuine theory of television

criticism, one that respects the nature of the medium at the same time that it establishes standards of excellence.

END NOTES

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