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Experience, Knowledge, and Democracy: Television through a Deweyan Lens

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Attick, D. (2008). "Consumption is the Message: Television, Advertising, and Youth," in *The Corporate Assault on America's Youth: Commercialism, Exploitation, and the End of Innocence,* Deron Boyles, ed. (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

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ABSTRACT

EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE, AND DEMOCRACY:
TELEVISION THROUGH A DEWEYAN LENS
by
Dennis Attick

While there have been numerous studies regarding television and its influence on modern life conducted in the past sixty years, there has not yet been a critique of television grounded in the work of John Dewey. John Dewey died when television was still a new technology; however, I believe that Dewey would have been critical of television had he lived to further experience it. One need only look to Dewey's writings regarding mass communication and media to see that he was critical of how communication technologies influence human society. Television programming is nearly ubiquitous today and it requires ongoing inquiry as its influence is widespread and continues to grow. This dissertation extends television studies by developing a Deweyan critique of the medium. I assert in this dissertation that Dewey's philosophy, especially his notions of experience, knowledge, and democracy can inform a current critique of television.

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A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Education Policy Studies
in
the Department of Educational Policy Studies
in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A work like this is not possible without the ongoing support of numerous people. I offer my thanks to my immediate and extended family for their support over the years. Most importantly, I extend thanks to my mother, who showed me through her actions the importance and value of hard work, integrity, and resilience.

I would like to thank my advisor, Deron Boyles, for his assistance during the writing of this dissertation. This work would not have been possible without his input and assistance. I also extend my thanks to him for his ongoing support of my professional development over the last five years. I look forward to our continued work together in the future.

I also thank Dr. Breault, Dr. Esposito, and Dr. Freeman for their insight regarding this dissertation over the past several years, and especially during the final stages of this process. Each of them offered prescient points that significantly impacted this work.

I would also like to thank all of the individuals on the 4th floor who have helped me out a great deal over the past few years. I must especially recognize Jeff Stockwell whose assistance has been significant and helped me meet all the dreaded deadlines. I also thank Tony Carusi for camaraderie over the past few years. His insights contributed to my overcoming several roadblocks in the writing of this dissertation.

My completion of the Ph.D. program and writing of this dissertation would not be possible without the care, support, and patience shown me by my wife Krisa over the past five years. I acknowledge Krisa for her strength, concern, and ongoing support of my endeavors.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my children, Cassidy and Cole. They are, in so small part, responsible for bringing aspects of this dissertation to life. I hope that in time this work inspires them as they navigate the joys and challenges they encounter throughout their lives.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

A recent study by The Kaiser Family Foundation indicates that more than 80% of young people between the ages of eight and eighteen watch more than three hours of television programming each day.[1] The same study reveals that 68% of those young people have televisions in their bedrooms. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the average young person in the United States grows up in a house with four television sets.[2] More recently, a television industry report from 2006 shows that television viewership was at an all-time high during the 2005-2006 television season.[3] The industry report indicates that the highest increase in viewing was among pre-teen females. Other recent studies have shown that the average household in the

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[1] *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year Olds,* Kaiser Family Foundation Report (March 2005). This report is based on a random survey of 2,032 young people between the ages of eight and eighteen. 99% of young people interviewed for this survey said their family owned a TV and 65% of the families owned more than three televisions. The report can be found at http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/Executive-Summary-Generation-M-Media-in-the-Lives-of-8-18-Year-olds.pdf. Last accessed July 21, 2008.

[2] Amy Jordan, James Hersey, Judith McDivitt, and Carrie Heitzler, "Reducing Children's Television-Viewing Time: A Qualitative Study of Parents and Their Children," *Pediatrics* 118, no.5 (2006): 1303-1310.

[3] Andrew Wallenstein, "TV Viewership Hits Record High," *Reuters* (9/22/06).

United States has four television sets.[4] As of October 2007, television viewership

remained at record levels with the average American household having at least one

television turned on in the house for more than seven hours per day.[5]

    Critical theorist and cultural critic Douglas Kellner has argued that most

individuals spend more time watching television before starting elementary school than

they will spend in a classroom during their entire school career.[6] Neil Postman and Jerry

Mander join with Kellner in arguing that most adults in the last half of the twentieth

century grew up watching television and learned to use television as a primary source of

information and entertainment.[7] Television continues to be a prominent feature in the

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[4] See, for example, Daheia Barr-Anderson, Patricia van den Berg, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, and Mary Story, "Characteristics Associated with Older Adolescents Who Have a Television in Their Bedrooms," *Pediatrics* 121, no. 4 (April 2008): 718-724; and Dimitri Christakis and Frederick J. Zimmerman, "Violent Television Viewing During Preschool is Associated with Antisocial Behavior During School Age," *Pediatrics* 120, no.5 (November 2007): 993-999.

[5] Nielsen Company Report, "Nielsen Reports Television Tuning Remains at Record Levels," *Nielsen Report* (October 2007). Report can be found at http://www.nielsenmedia.com/nc/portal/site/Public/menuitem.55dc65b4a7d5adff3f65936 147a062a0/?vgnextoid=13280e5b2cea5110VgnVCM100000ac0a260aRCRD. Last accessed July 1, 2008. The report indicated that television viewing continues to be the dominate media of choice for American families, and that children continue to be ardent watchers of television programming.

[6] Douglass Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1990), 126. Kellner argues that television is an isolating force that erodes both a sense of community, and the free democratic exchange of ideas. He extends the work of the Frankfurt School scholars in asserting that television is antithetical to democracy.

[7] See, for example, Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 9-17; and Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Harper Collins, 1978). Postman and Mander contend that television became the primary source of information and entertainment for individuals in the United States during the late twentieth century.

lives of most Americans, this dissertation argues that television is worthy of ongoing investigation today.

The goal of this dissertation is to extend television studies by developing a Deweyan critique of the medium. John Dewey was a prolific writer who became increasingly interested in examining the power of communication media during the latter years of his life. In 1939 Dewey warned of the hegemonic power of communication technologies such as radios and newspapers and their ability to influence popular opinion.[8] For Dewey, the proliferation of communication media carried the possibility that such technologies would be used not to enlighten individuals, but to homogenize and manipulate them. Dewey wrote specifically about communication technology later in his life, and while his writings were concerned with the media of his age, many of his ideas regarding mass media can inform a study of television today.

Questions

This dissertation answers several specific questions that serve as focal points for this project. The specific questions to be answered include: When and how did television become such a prominent feature of life in the United States? In terms of cultural studies, how has television shaped our individual interactions as well as society's understanding of itself? Can John Dewey's writings inform our current understanding of television? More specifically, and most importantly for this study, what can Dewey's theories of

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[8] John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1939/1989), 36. Dewey believed that the rapid distribution of information could be beneficial to the well-being of society, but he was wary of the fact that mass media could become a hegemonic tool if all members of society did not have a stake in the production and distribution of information.

experience, knowledge, and democracy offer to a current critique of television? Further, can public schools utilize a Deweyan approach to help students create counter-narratives to those found in current television programming?

Framework

This dissertation utilizes philosophical, historical, and conceptual analysis. Any project that examines television and its influence on culture must wrestle with what television is and how it came to be so pervasive in U.S. society. For the purpose of this dissertation television is defined as a cultural artifact that maintains and elicits meanings within society. As television critic John Fiske argues, "Television is, above all else, a cultural medium."[9] Television continues to be a crucial feature of the social and cultural lives of most Americans. Television influences the ways in which human beings engage with each other socially and culturally, it shapes social interactions and understandings.

The literature for this dissertation focuses on many of John Dewey's books and articles, with specific attention paid to his works regarding experience, knowledge, democracy, and mass communication technology. I also examine academic and lay texts and journal articles regarding television and cultural studies, Marxist critiques of popular culture, and clinical studies regarding television's influence on human behavior. While this dissertation focuses on several of Dewey's philosophical positions, my project also include aspects of historical and cultural analysis. Philosophical inquiry requires ongoing exploration into our existence and the world we inhabit; yet, that exploration must also include an understanding of the cultural and historical aspects that frame how philosophy

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[9] John Fiske, *Television Culture: Popular Pleasures and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 36.

is experienced.[10] One cannot undertake a philosophical work without examining that which has been previously argued, as well as the context out of which those arguments grew.

While this dissertation relies on the philosophy of John Dewey for its direction, I could not conduct a Deweyan critique of television without also investigating the history of television as a cultural and social reality. Further, I include an investigation into historical critiques of television to inform my own notion of how we might better understand television in contemporary times. Philosophy and history are intertwined across time and cannot be conceived as mutually exclusive concepts by which one comes to better understand the world. Therefore, one cannot "do" philosophy without also comprehending history. While philosophy is grounded in historical notions of essence and existence, philosophy also informs present and future activity.

The philosopher Wilfred Carr speaks to the idea that philosophy serves both the past and present. Carr argues that philosophy is always constrained by the cultural history of which it is a part, yet, it also "makes an active contribution to that culture's future evolution and development."[11] The point that Carr makes here recalls Dewey's own desire that philosophy serve to "clarify men's ideas as to the social and moral strifes of their own day. Its aim is to become so far as is humanly possible an organ for dealing

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[10] Margret Buchmann and Robert Floden, "On Doing Philosophy of Teacher Education," *Oxford Review of Education* 16, no. 3 (1990): 343-366. Buchmann and Floden assert that all individuals engage in philosophical inquiry so as to "respond to and express the human need for understanding…." The authors contend that philosophical inquiry is bound to the historical and cultural contexts in which the search for understanding occurs.

[11] Wilfred Carr, "Philosophy and Education," *The Journal of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain* 38 (2004): 55-74.

with these conflicts."[12] For Dewey, and later Carr, philosophy should inform current action so as to improve present situations. I use historical and cultural analyses as a backdrop for my current investigation into how Dewey's philosophy influences our current understanding of the medium.

This dissertation borrows from, and agrees with, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and the other Frankfurt School scholars who conceived of television as a culture industry. The Frankfurt School held that communication technologies serve the interests of the elite ruling class by socializing and distracting the general public through a system they named the "culture industry."[13] The culture industries, most of them controlled by large corporate entities, used the power of their communication networks to define and shape that which was presented as truth via media. In this sense, the culture industries became the primary owners and distributors of culture within capitalist systems.[14]

I begin the dissertation by examining the history of television in the United States, while also providing an overview of previous scholarly research and critiques regarding television. The first part of this dissertation examines the critiques of television that have been written throughout the twentieth century. The historical analysis includes examining the rise of television as a structural entity in American culture before moving into an examination of major television studies conducted since the early 1940s. The studies

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[12] John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1920/1957), 7.

[13] Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry Revisited," in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader,* ed. Stephen Bronner and Douglas Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1989), 128-135. See also Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, 10-11.

[14] Ibid., 12.

include the works of scholars such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkeimer, Marshall

McLuhan, and George Gerbner. I also examine several of the key conceptual frameworks

in past television critiques that span the 20th century. These frameworks include the

Frankfurt School's conceptualization of television as a culture industry, effects research,

cultivation analysis, and research regarding the relationship between television and

democracy.[15] These conceptual frameworks inform questions regarding television that

integrate several of Dewey's ideas with our current beliefs about television.

I have relied on John Dewey's theories of experience, knowledge, and democracy

to ground this dissertation. While each of these concepts can be discussed as isolated

ideas, they are, in keeping with Dewey, integrated ideas that together influence how

human beings make sense of a changing world. As Jim Garrison argues, Dewey held that

human beings are participants in "a continuously creative, unfinished, and unfinishable

universe."[16] To Dewey, the world was a transactional activity and enterprise with

humankind engaged together in continuous and integrated activity. In this sense, treating

Dewey's ideas as discrete, isolated ideas would not serve Dewey's guiding notion of

integration and continuity. While I treat Dewey's theories of experience, knowledge, and

democracy as separate sections of this dissertation, it is for the purpose of clarity and

each will be shown to be in transaction with the other. I specifically examine the

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[15] Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1947/1972), 124. *Dialectic* is one of the more important works to emerge from the Frankfurt School. The work posits that an enlightenment rationale renders human beings subject to domination by the class in power. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the systematic legitimating of that domination is realized via mass media messages broadcast by networks that are part of the culture industry apparatus. See also Adorno, "The Culture Industry Revisited."

[16] Jim Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 12.

relationship between each of Dewey's theories and our current understanding of television and its influence on modern culture in the United States.

Indeed, regarding television and experience, I borrow from Dewey's ideas of educative and miseducative experience in questioning whether watching television represents a miseducative experience in a Deweyan sense. I examine how Dewey's theories of educative experiences support and/or contradict the past body of literature regarding television studies. For instance, I investigate how Dewey's ideas address previous fields within television studies such as cultivation analysis and effects research. I further locate Dewey's ideas of educative experience within the larger framework of television studies that posit that television has an effect on viewers.

When looking at the relationship between television and knowledge, I rely on Dewey's epistemology that draws a distinction between knowing and knowledge. I look at Dewey's notion of warranted assertibility in relation to television watching and the passivity that I argue television watching engenders. I argue, in subsequent chapters, that television contributes to individuals becoming inconsequential spectators of a changing world. I also examine how Dewey's epistemology informs our understanding of past television research, some of which posits, contrary to the argument I present, that television is a communicative tool that disseminates knowledge and brings human beings from disparate groups together.

With regard to democracy, I look at Dewey's notion of democratic life and how that notion informs an understanding of the relationship between television and

democracy.[17] In relation to television, I argue that Dewey's concern that mass media can be an undemocratic force in society closely resembles the beliefs of the Frankfurt School scholars who posited that mass media serve only to distract and homogenize individuals. I see Dewey's belief in democracy, and his distrust of a centralized mass media, as being similar to the position of the Frankfurt School. This dissertation extends these critiques to include Dewey's thoughts and concerns in this area.

While I have cited three of Dewey's more important philosophical positions in which I ground this critique of television, there are countless other ways in which Deweyan ideas permeate this dissertation. Other ideas that provide subtexts here include Dewey's theories of communication and mass media, as well as his ideas regarding the development of intellect and learning, and his overarching ideas on education. However, John Dewey was a prolific writer; accordingly, I do not touch on all of Dewey's theories and philosophical frameworks. While I acknowledge that Dewey wrote extensively on subjects such as art, aesthetics, and naturalistic inquiry, I do not concentrate on these areas in my dissertation, even though some of Dewey's thoughts on those subjects inform this inquiry.

Significance

While there have been numerous studies regarding television and its influence on modern life conducted in the past fifty years, there has not yet been a critique of television grounded in the work of John Dewey. John Dewey died at a time when television was in its infancy; however, I assert that Dewey would have been an ardent critic of television had he lived to more fully experience it. One need only look to

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[17] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1916/1944).

Dewey's writings regarding the mass media of his day, notably radio and newspapers, to see that he was keenly aware of how communication technologies influence human society.

This work is significant insofar as Dewey's theories can shed new light on our understanding of television and its relationship to experience, knowledge, democracy and education. Previous television research has focused on television as a popular cultural phenomenon that influences current attitudes and behaviors. The goal of this dissertation is to move beyond a popular culture critique and open up new avenues by which to explore television and its place in modern life. I argue that a Deweyan critique of television is relevant since Dewey was an ardent critic of mass communication in his time, writing often about the influence that newspapers and radio programming had on the framing of public opinion.[18] I also explore how schools can promote media literacy and create opportunities for young people to develop the means by which to question television and its influence in their lives.

In the 1930s, Dewey warned of the dangers of cheap, professionalized mass media and they influence they might have on the moral and intellectual development of individuals, and especially the young. In an article written with John L. Childs, Dewey and Childs caution about the emerging communication technologies of their era:

> They [science and machinery] have introduced on a large scale alluring
> forms of commercialized amusement that leave children and youth passive

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[18] See, for example, John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* (New York: Prometheus, 1939/1989); John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems,* in *The Later Works of John Dewey, Vol.2*: *1925-1927*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press), 1988; and John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1935/1999). As I discuss in chapter four, Dewey saw the public press as instrumental in framing public opinion and shaping the ways in which individuals participate in civic life.

but excited at the time when they are also deprived of normal outlets of action. The public which is literate in the use of linguistic tools, but which is not educated in social information and understanding becomes a ready victim of those who use, for their own private economic and political ends, the public press.[19]

To Dewey and Childs, the encroachment of professionalized entertainment on public life was making it increasingly difficult for an active public to define and understand itself. Dewey saw the public press not only as a means by which people could better understand one another, but also as a tool of powerful factions who owned the distribution of information. Those individuals and entities that maintained control of information had the power to decide what was communicated via the press. Dewey believed that the public press would be used by those in power to keep the general public distracted and misinformed so as to maintain status quo power structures within society. Used in this sense, the press could be seen as a threat to the democratic life Dewey espoused.

Abbreviations and Definitions

I include here a few brief definitions of terms, as well as descriptions of important entities that appear throughout this dissertation. I discuss each of these in greater detail throughout the dissertation.

Federal Communications Committee (FCC)—An independent United States government agency created in 1934. The FCC is charged with regulating the nation's

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[19] John Dewey and John L. Childs, "The Social-Economic Situation and Education*," The Educational Frontier*, ed. William H. Kilpatrick (New York and London: Century Co., 1933), 32-72, in *John Dewey: The Later Works, Vol. 8: 1933*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 43-76, 45.

non-governmental use of the radio airwaves including both radio and television transmission.

RCA—The Radio Corporation of America. A leading corporate entity that controlled much of the nation's airwaves in the early twentieth century and went on to be a major force in the programming and dissemination of television broadcasts.

NBC—The National Broadcasting Company. Along with RCA, NBC controlled much of the early television programming in the United States.

ABC—The American Broadcasting System. Along with NBC it was one of the first three major networks to own and control television programming in the United States.

CBS—The Columbia Broadcasting System. Another of the three major networks, along with NBC and ABC, that controlled television programming throughout much of the twentieth century.

Mass Media—The communication technologies that distribute information to and given society. Today, the main types of mass media include radio, television, internet technology, and newspapers.

Democracy--A system of living that involves ongoing association and interconnectedness amongst individuals. In a democracy ideas are shared, debated, and substantiated by all the members of a given society. Responsibility for governance is shared.

Frankfurt School—The Frankfurt School is the name given to a group of critical theorists from the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany. The Frankfurt School scholars were critical of capitalist power structures in the early 20th century. They

were critical of the role that the mass media plays in maintaining established power structures in society and wrote some of the earliest critiques of television.

Culture Industry— The Frankfurt School scholars coined this term in arguing that popular culture is disseminated in a manner similar akin to a factory producing standardized goods. The Frankfurt School argued that all popular culture was really one culture industry that helped lead the mass of individuals to be obedient to market interests.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ANALYSES

The Rise of Television

Television appeared on the American landscape in the late 1930s forever

changing American culture. The technology that led to the capability for the transmission

of television broadcasts has roots in the mechanical and electronic scanning devices

created in the early 1930s.[20] Those devices owe much to the 1927 invention of the

vacuum tube television display created by twenty-one year old Philo Farnsworth, who is

largely recognized as the creator of modern television technology.[21] While still in high

school, Farnsworth had conceived of an electric system that could capture moving

images, code those images onto radio waves, and then transform the images back into

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[20] Edward L. Palmer, *Children in the Cradle of Television* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Company, 1987), xi. Palmer's book offers both a thorough analysis of the development of television technology, as well as the rise of children's television programming and the history of televisual media in the United States.

[21] Paul Schatzkin, *The Boy Who Invented Television* (Silver Springs, MD: TeamCom Books, 2002). Schatzkin argues that Farnsworth created the initial drawings for his vacuum tube television display in 1920 when Farnsworth was only fourteen years old. Fifteen years later, Farnsowrth's high school teacher would recreate those drawings to help Farnsworth in his patent litigation with the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) over the rights to his inventions that led to the creation of modern television. Farnsworth eventually won litigation against RCA and became the first inventor ever awarded a patent license from RCA. For more information on Philo Farnsworth's experiments that led to his creation of television technology see www.philofarnsworth.com. Last accessed August 3, 2008.

pictures on a screen. Farnsworth's creations, vacuum and carthode ray technology, are recognized as providing the foundation of television technology.[22]

Within ten years of making his discovery, Farnsworth's ideas were being used by the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and Radio Corporation of America (RCA) to produce both televisions sets, as well as the satellite systems needed to distribute television programming across the airwaves. RCA had already established itself as a powerful media force in controlling the nation's radio broadcasts and it quickly set its sights on taking control of television. As Douglas Kellner argues, "RCA also had hegemonic dreams of control over the entire communications system of the United States."[23] Accordingly, RCA moved to harness the new television technology. RCA would go on to influence television programming in the United States throughout the 20th century.[24]

Throughout the late 1930s, Farnsworth's television technology was further refined and developed by NBC and RCA as the two corporations fought to gain control of the new medium. During this time, television was revealed to the population with limited programming available to network insiders and wealthy families who could afford the earliest television sets. It was not until 1939 that the general public would be granted

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[22] Ibid. For further discussion on the technological breakthroughs that led to television, and how that technology was mass produced and proliferated across the country in the 1930s and 1940s, see Orrin Dunlap, Jr., *Understanding Television: What It Is and How It Works* (New York: Greenberg, 1948), Luther Gable, *The Miracle of Television* (Chicago, IL: Wilcox and Follett, 1949), and Philip Kerby, *The Victory of Television* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939).

[23] Douglas Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 38.

[24] Ibid., 39.

exposure to television when NBC presented a television exhibit at the World's Fair in New York City.[25] It was at the World's Fair that RCA president David Sarnoff announced, "Now, we add sight to sound," as he unveiled to newspaper reporters a small television set sitting atop a podium.[26] Visitors at the World's Fair were treated to television broadcasts of President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivering an address, a major league baseball game, and the earliest advertisements for television sets. The unveiling of the first television set was heralded as a triumph of American ingenuity, and the sets were received as a welcome addition to American culture. As Minow and Lamay assert:

> Not only was television the crowning achievement of a century's worth
> of technological advance in photography, electricity, and telegraphy, but
> it brought together in one device the news and information functions of
> the press, the personal and family delights of the phonograph, the entertainment
> grandeur of the motion picture, and the immediacy of radio.[27]

In this sense, television was, as Minow and Lamay argue, "revolutionary."[28]

The public response to television was so overwhelmingly positive that RCA and NBC followed the exhibit at the World's Fair with a nationwide advertising campaign trumpeting television as an amazing new home entertainment device. However, not everyone was convinced that television was a positive addition to modern life and skeptics soon began to speak out about television. The writer E.B. White had the

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Newton N. Minow and Craig L. Lamay, *Abandoned in the Wasteland: Children, Television, and The First Amendment* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 81.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

following reaction when he was offered an early glimpse of the first television broadcasts

in 1939:

> We shall stand or fall by television—of that I am sure…I believe
> television is going to be the test of the modern world, and that in
> this new opportunity to see beyond the range of our vision, we shall
> discover either a new and unbearable disturbance to the general
> peace, or a saving radiance in the sky. [29]

White's proclamation spoke to the potential power of the new technology; however; he

was not alone in questioning television's place in society, and more importantly, under

whose control television would fall. When television was still in its nascent stage, Frank

Waldrop and Joseph Borkin sounded an early warning about television's power. In an

argument that is similar to that of the Frankfurt School theorists, Waldrop and Borkin

assert:

> To be exact, television represents a synthesis of scientific achievements
> by means of which electric analyses of sounds and of the appearance of
> objects are blended and transmitted in a split second throughout wide areas.
> Television is just a trick, really; the trick of using electrons to look at
> something not visible to the naked eye. But through the perfecting of this
> trick the means of access to public credulity, and to the power which that
> access gives, lies open to some man's grasp-and not enough people know it.[30]

Waldrop and Borkin's early critique of television is prescient as they ask critical

questions about who should control television, who should benefit from its power, and

what influence it would have on human behavior.[31]

While the technology and manufacturing resources needed to create and distribute

televisions and television programming was realized in the early 1940s, the United States

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[29] Ibid., 206.

[30] Frank Waldrop and Joseph Borkin, *Television: A Struggle for Power* (New York: Stratford Press, 1938).

[31] Ibid., 4-5.

was soon drawn into World War II and the country diverted its engineering and

manufacturing capabilities toward winning the war. Art and popular culture historian

David Joselit argues that the growth in availability of television sets in the mid-1940s was

largely due to a need to put wartime manufacturing to use at the close of World War II.[32]

After the war, the United States faced the challenge of putting the manufacturing

capacities that helped win the war to peace time use. Television historian William Boddy

asserts that during World War II, defense expenditures pushed radio manufacturing up

over 1000 percent from pre-war time, and once the war ended, the manufacturing of

television sets put to use the resources that once produced radios for the war effort.[33]

It was not until after World War II that television was understood as a product

that could be mass marketed to the general population. As Barnouw argues:

> In 1945, as peace came…Electronic assembly lines, freed from production
> of electronic war material, were ready to turn out picture tubes and television
> sets. Consumers, long confronted by wartime shortages and rationing, had
> accumulated savings and were ready to buy. Manufacturers of many kinds,
> ready to switch from armaments back to consumer goods, were eager to
> advertise. The situation awaited a catalyst, a signal.[34]

That signal was television licensing and, by 1946, the Federal Communication

Commission (FCC) obliged. The FCC granted the licenses with the understanding that

television was poised to be the next great communication technology of the twentieth

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[32] David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 17-18.

[33] William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 20.

[34] Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television* (New York: Oxford, 1990), 99.

century. The FCC wasted no time in granting subsequent requests for licenses and patents.[35]

By mid-1946, DuMont and RCA offered the first black and white television sets to the public.[36] By 1947, more than one million television sets had been sold in the United States as nearly one-in-a-hundred households owned a television.[37] By 1950, that number had grown to one-in-ten households as television ownership exploded during the prosperous post-war years.[38] Television was an important aspect of post war peace and prosperity and it became an integral part of family life during this time.

It was during the mid-1940s that the three companies that had controlled the country's radio broadcasts throughout the early 1900s gained control of the new visual medium.[39] These companies, National Broadcasting Company (NBC), American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), each offered

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 33.

[37] Palmer, *Children in the Cradle of Television*, xiii.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Dennis W. Mazzocco, *Networks of Power* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1994). These companies set in motion the mechanism for network oligopoly that remain today with four corporate entities owning 75% of the channels and programming available on cable and satellite television. For more on network oligopoly see Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, and Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*.

American viewers one channel of television programming by the mid-1940s.[40] In fact,

after several years of offering one to two hours of programming per day, in October

1948, the three networks each launched full days of television programming.[41] The

programs aired during this time included boxing matches, soap operas, and variety

shows.

By the late 1940s, the first attempts to control television programming were

waged. The battle over television content that began in the 1940s would continue over the

course of the century. The FCC was created in 1934 to oversee the broadcast industry

with a mission to promote broadcasting in the public interest.[42] Early on, the FCC held

that the airwaves belonged to the public, that the networks should be responsible to the

needs of the community, not just looking for means by which to generate greater profit.

As Minow and Lamay argue, the idea of media serving the public interest has been at the

crux of any debate regarding mass communication in the last seventy-five years.[43] This

battle over television's role in society continues to be waged today.

During the 1940s, the FCC's focus moved from radio to television as television

was quickly becoming the popular form of media. The FCC issued a report on the Public

Service Responsibility of Broadcasters in 1946, a report that became known as the Blue

Book.[44] The Blue Book examined the issues related to balancing the free expression of

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[40] Ibid., 29-30

[41] Palmer, *Children in the Cradle of Television*, xiii.

[42] Minow and Lamay, *Abandoned in the Wasteland*, 66-67.

[43] Ibid. 67.

[44] Ibid., 92.

ideas with those of social responsibility and the rights of the audience. It was also the

FCC's first attempt to limit advertising on television and radio. In the early years of

television, much of its content was focused on providing factual information that was

deemed relevant to the general public.[45] As Lynn Spigel argues, television's early

popularity was rooted in post-war American culture where suburban families became

more rooted to a domestic home life and entertainment was seen as a private enterprise

for the first time.[46] As Spigel argues, "Television's installation into the American home

took place at a time when domesticity was a central preoccupation of the burgeoning

middle class."[47] It was during the post-war manufacturing boom that television, and the

development of cheap oil for automobiles, aided in the creation of a new suburban

lifestyle that was focused on privatized entertainment and consumption of material

items.[48]

While television was initially seen as a relevant communication technology

capable of the rapid distribution of information, it would not be long before television

programming would become decidedly more entertainment-driven. Spigel argues that

television was a central part of life in the post-war years and it increasingly moved

entertainment into the home. For the first time in history, entertainment and leisure

became more a private affair than a pubic action. Spigel asserts

Popular media of the postwar years illuminate some of the central

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[45] Palmer, *Children in the Cradle of Television,* 31.

[46] Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 11.

[47] Ibid., 33.

[48] Ibid.

tensions expressed by the mass culture at a time when spectator amusements were being transported form the public to the private sphere. As least at the level of representation, the installation of the television set was by no means a simple purchase of a pleasure machine.[49]

Moreover, early television's priorities included creating a "commercial aesthetic that would appeal widely enough to those who could afford to participate in the national marketplace, offend few, and provide a hospitable environment for the selling that paid its way."[50] Television was (is), after all, a commercial enterprise controlled by large corporate entities that are in business to make a profit.

By the end of the 1950s, television had surpassed print media in viewership, and between 1948 and 1955, television sets were installed in nearly two-thirds of the nation's homes.[51] By 1960, nearly 90% of American households had at least one television set with the average American watching more than four hours of television programming per day.[52] It was during the 1950s that families began to wrestle with the place that television could and would play in American life.

It was during the 1960s that critics began to look closely at the role that television played in human life. In 1961, Federal Communication Commission Chairman Newton

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[49] Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 187.

[50] Mike Budd, Steve Craig, and Clay Steinman, *Consuming Environments: Television and Commercial Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 10. The authors explore how, with its portrayals of a world focused on material possessions, television continues to nurture a culture of consumerism in the United States and abroad.

[51] Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 1.

[52] Ibid. It should be noted that this number has remained relatively stable throughout the last forty years.

Minow addressed the National Association of Broadcasters with a bold indictment of television as a "vast wasteland."[53] Minnow challenged the developing industry to do more for the public interest, asking that the industry continue to examine how it could better serve the interest of the country. Minow also challenged the industry to find ways to expand the home viewer's options by diversifying programming and limiting the control of individual networks.[54]

While the general public had access to television programming for nearly twenty years by the end of the 1960s, it was the 1970s that saw television cement its place as a cultural phenomenon.[55] It was also during the 1970s that children were seen as a specific sub-category of television viewer.[56] While the FCC had refused to take action on creating parameters regarding children's television, Action for Children's Television (ACT) pressured Congress and the FCC to take action to protect television's youngest viewers. In 1975, ACT found some success in getting FCC chairman Richard Wiley to prod networks to devote the first two hours of prime-time to "family-viewing time."[57] The pressure form ACT and other concerned parents groups was not enough to overcome the television industry that lobbied against the FCC, arguing that restrictions on programming were a violation of free speech. Before long, the family-viewing time was

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[53] Minow and Lamay, *Abandoned in the Wasteland*, 188-189.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Palmer, *Children in the Cradle of Television*, 32.

[56] Ibid., 33.

[57] Minow and Lamay, *Abandoned in the Wasteland*, 98.

history, but the battle over the control of programming, for both children and adults, would be waged for years to come.

The end of the 1970s saw technological advances in satellite transmission that led to the proliferation of cable television and new channels, challenging the control of the big three networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) for the first time.[58] Prior to 1975, the big three networks had a prime-time rating of 56.5%, which meant that on any given night, more than 50% of the country's televisions were tuned to one of the three networks.[59] By 1980, that number had fallen to 39% as cable options expanded viewing options with multiple new channels available to the home viewer.

During the 1980s, television thrived during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, who was decidedly pro-business and anti-regulation. Many of the government regulations regarding television programming and advertising were stripped away during the Reagan-era deregulation that silenced the FCC in favor of market-based decision-making regarding television.[60] As Douglas Kellner argues, during the 1980s, FCC chairman Mark Fowler, a Reagan political operative, attempted to remove all structural barriers on broadcasting to eliminate as many restraints on programming as possible.[61] The Fowler-led FCC sought to reverse decades of regulatory guidelines once enacted by the FCC to promote television in the public interest. Reagan appointees to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) also overturned the FCC's "Staff Report on Television Advertising to

[58] Budd, et al., *Consuming Environments*, 25.

[59] Ibid., 26.

[60] Minow and Lamay, *Abandoned in the Wasteland*, 20.

[61] Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, 64.

Children," a report that warned against any advertising to children via television.[62] The Reagan administration offered all aspects of public and private life to the workings of the market.

The changes brought during the Reagan years had several notable effects on the landscape of American television. The 1980s saw an increase in advertising on television, more violence in children's programming, cutbacks in news and public affairs programming, as well as the creation of "reality programming."[63] It was also during this time that the major networks merged with larger corporate entities leading to the creation of multinational communication companies that came to represent the new face of network media in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.[64] Today, the United States has a media system dominated by a small number of large, multinational corporations who control much of what is seen and heard via communication media every day.[65]

Deregulation had a major impact on the television industry throughout the 1980s and 1990s. However, even though the television industry was left to the control of the market, the FCC continued to counter certain aspects of the free-market approach to television. In 1990, the FCC passed the *Children's Television Act* that requires broadcasters to limit advertising on children's television, as well the *Cable Act* which

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[62] Palmer, *Children in the Cradle of Television*, 49-50.

[63] Ibid., 66.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Robert W. McChesney, *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 20.

restricts the number of television channels a media company can own.[66] However, it is worth noting that late in 2007, the FCC regulations guarding against media oligopoly were overturned by a Republican-led FCC that seeks to allow for further conglomeration of the country's media.[67] Recently, the United States Senate vetoed the FCC's action after public outrage over this ongoing move toward further media conglomeration.

While television has been a fixture in American homes for nearly seventy years now, its popularity continues to grow. Throughout the last ten years, television viewing options have increased exponentially with the onset of cable television, television-equipped cell phones, and the ability to watch television programming via the internet.[68] As *Newsweek* magazine observes, "One thing is clear: the race is on toward ubiqui-TV."[69] With television nearly ubiquitous in modern society, spaces that were once free from media messages are increasingly becoming crowded with the din of the media technology.

A recent advertisement for Samsung's new cell-phone television encourages the privatization of public space where private citizens use hand held television screens to

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[66] Budd, et al., *Consuming Environments*, 47.

[67] Information regarding the recent FCC activity regarding media conglomeration can be found at www.stopbigmedia.com, a website administered by a coalition of media companies and scholars.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Johnnie L. Roberts, "Small TV, Big War," *Newsweek* (10/24/05): 29. This article examines the deal struck between the multi-national conglomerates ABC/Disney and Apple which allows for Disney/ABC TV programming to be broadcast on Ipods and other handheld media devices.

"imagine the world as a living room."[70] These new technologies allow viewers to watch television programming nearly everywhere and at almost any time. As media critic Jodi Kantor argues, "small-screen television fills the ragged holes that already exist in your routine: the 37 minute train to work, the 6 minute line at Starbucks…the stretches spent in the bathroom."[71] Television is everywhere, and the public continues to watch. Recall that as television viewing options continue to increase, so do television ratings as the 2005-2006 television season was watched by the largest number of viewers since the television's inception.[72] There has been no decrease in television viewing among the general population despite the rise of emergent technologies such as the Internet, video gaming systems, and hand-held music and mobile video devices.[73] In a crowded media landscape, television remains as popular as ever.

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[70] Benjamin R. Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 224. Barber argues, following Habermasian notions of publics that television increasingly encroaches upon public spaces that were once arenas for democratic exchange, learning opportunities, and civic engagement.

[71] Jodi Kantor, "The Extra-Large, Ultra-Small Medium," *New York Times* (10/30/06): A1. Kantor examines the expanding presence of television screens in every aspect of modern life. Further, content providers have already begun experimenting with abridged programming, short segments of longer television shows fit to the busy life of the viewer who can watch short segments of programming while in line at the supermarket or riding the bus to work.

[72] See, for example, Wallenstein, "TV Viewership Hits Record High," *Reuters* (9/22/06): 1; and *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year Olds,* Kaiser Family Foundation Report (March 2005).

[73] Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole.*

Television: A Culture Industry

Social and cultural critic Gordon Berry argues that television is "firmly rooted in the culture of American society."[74] However, Berry also notes that television's roots are neither innocuous nor ordinary when he asserts:

> This medium came into American society to be a serious contender
> with those traditional agents of socialization known as the family,
> school, religious institutions, and even the peer group. Television
> and its messages did not have to play by the historical rules of the
> traditional socializing agents, but it quickly embraced their old cultural
> messages and proceeded to carve out its own unique way of
> characterizing, portraying, and interpreting the customs, values, and
> beliefs that were so much a part of American life. [75]

Television took the form of cultural storyteller and created its own world of images, sound, and people that forever changed the way societies and cultures would come to know about themselves. To this end, the history of television is incomplete without an understanding of the influence television has had on American culture over the last seventy-five years.

Cultural studies examines how certain phenomena effects one's understanding of issues such as race, class, gender, communication, ideology and politics, a cultural analysis of television will contribute to the framework in which this dissertation is conducted. Cultural analysis is also intertwined with the history of television and offers insight into how we can understand television today.

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[74] Gordon Berry, "Television, Social Roles, and Marginality: Portrayals of the Past and Images for the Future," in *Children and Television: Fifty Years of Research*, eds. Norman Pecora, John P. Murray, and Ellen Ann Wartella (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 85-107, 90.

[75] Ibid., 85.

Douglas Kellner argues that the earliest critiques of television came from the members of the Frankfurt School, which grew out of the Institute for Social Research founded in Frankfurt, Germany in 1923.[76] The Frankfurt School scholars, including Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas forged Marxist critiques of capitalism, social theory, technology, and mass communication among other topics, in their quest to eradicate the imbalance of power in society writ large. It was the scholars of the Frankfurt School that helped develop a "critical theory" of society, a theory which was and is used to argue against positivistic social theory in an ongoing critique of monopolistic capitalism of the early twentieth century.[77]

The Frankfurt School held that communication technologies serve the interests of the ruling class by socializing and distracting the general public through a system they named the "culture industry."[78] These culture industries, controlled by elites who owned the means of production and distribution of information, were agents of mass deception and distraction.[79] Adorno and Horkheimer deconstructed mass media systems by exposing the political, economic, and social imbalances maintained via the mass distribution of information. Initially, the Frankfurt School scholars focused their

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[76] Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, 10. Kellner furthers the argument of the Frankfurt School members which holds that TV undermines our sense of community and public life, as well as our potential to see democracy realized.

[77] Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 1-3.

[78] Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, 10-11.

[79] Ronald N. Jacobs, "From Mass to Public: Rethinking the Value of the Culture Industry," in *Culture in the World, Vol.2: Cultural Sociology and the Democratic Imperative*, ed. Jeffrey Alexander and I. Reed (New York: Paradigm Press, 2007), 101-128.

arguments on the homogenization of art and film audiences but it was not long before they turned their attention to television.

Adorno and Horkheimer conceived of society as consisting of disconnected individuals who were homogenized into a mass audience by the culture industries. One of the first moves of the culture industry is to immobilize audiences, treating individuals as an unidentifiable mass that can be measured and shaped like any other commodity.[80] Here, sameness is privileged over diversity, and commonality is measured by standardized ratings. Adorno and Horkheimer argued that the culture industry strives to negate individual taste by creating a lowest common denominator of equivalent desires that stifles uniqueness and the desire to seek out art that is culturally relevant or artistic.[81] Thus, it should not be surprising to learn that when William Froug was hired as the executive producer of drama at CBS in 1964, he was instructed that his job was, "to produce shit."[82]

Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the culture industries produce mass audiences by encouraging the audience to define itself via consumption, and also by establishing a cultural space where freedom is defined by the ability to choose between prepackaged products that are increasingly similar.[83] Under this framework, the culture industry does

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[80] Ibid., 103.

[81] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment and Mass Deception," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*, eds. Meenakshi Durham, and Douglas Kellner (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 71-101. See also Adorno, "The Culture Industry Revisited."

[82] Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, 23.

[83] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment and Mass Deception."

not promulgate art, but becomes instead a profit-generating business rooted in a mass culture of consumption. Further, the culture industry acts as a chief form of leisure activity distracting the greater population away from other, perhaps more beneficial activities involving critical thought and action. Adorno and Horkheimer argue:

> By subordinating in the same way and the same end all areas of
> intellectual creation, by occupying men's sense from the time they
> leave the factory in the evening until the time they clock in
> again the next morning with matter that bears the impress of
> the labor process they themselves sustain throughout the day,
> this subsumption mockingly satisfies the concept of a unified
> culture which the philosophers of personality contrasted with
> mass culture.[84]

Here, the mass production of goods relegates cultural objects to another commodity to be consumed by a mass public that had been conditioned by the culture industries to have similar wants and tastes.

Under the Frankfurt School model, the mass media, with its ability to communicate messages to a vast majority of the population, is a key partner in the homogenization of tastes in a mass consumer culture. Adorno would write later:

> The very term mass media, especially honed for the culture industry,
> already shifts the accent onto harmless terrain. Neither is it a question
> of primary concern for the masses, nor of the techniques of communication
> as such, but of the spirit which sufflates them, their master's voice.[85]

Herbert Marcuse, a leading member of the Frankfurt School, joins Adorno and Horkheimer in arguing that mass media was responsible for creating a "one- dimensional man," a term he used to signify mankind's loss of freedom and identity in a society

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[84] Ibid., 23.

[85] Adorno, "The Culture Industry Revisited," 56.

marked by corporate controlled and mass produced materialism.[86] For Marcuse, the

media, a tool of the dominant class, could be used to shape individuals to want that which

is put forth as desirable via mass communication networks. To this end, the general

population is left adhering to ongoing media messages that often leaves them searching

after the same material things, all the while disengaging from critical social issues.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written in 1947, Adorno and Horkheimer warn of

television's ability to distract the population away from critical thinking by providing an

ongoing stream of passive entertainment and misinformation.[87] To the authors, television

added in-home visual stimulation to the distraction already wrought by radio. For Adorno

and Horkheimer, television would serve the purveyors of the culture industry unlike any

other previous device in that it united audio and visual content in a single object that

could easily be brought into the home.[88] It is in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that Adorno

and Horkheimer foresee the rise of television and warn of its coming influence in

asserting:

> Television aims at a synthesis of radio and film, and it is held
> up only because the interested parties have not yet reached
> agreement, but its consequences will be quite enormous and

[86] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964/1991). Marcuse asserts that one-dimensional man is losing the ability to be an individual, to be an independent critical thinker controlling his own destiny. He sees modern man as responding to external forces that shape one's hopes and values. Marcuse argues, in holding with Adorno and Horkheimer, that mass media plays a key role in the suppression of individuality through its promotion of specific ideals and objects, a process that ultimately homogenizes public tastes and wants. Marcuse asserts that in a world of technological rationality, individuals no longer sought alternatives to the existing order; instead, they worked to make the existing order even more efficient.

[87] Bernadette Casey, Neil Casey, Ben Calvert, Liam French, and Justin Lewis, *Television Studies: Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 13-14.

[88] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

> promise to intensify the impoverishment of aesthetic matter
> so drastically, that by tomorrow the thinly veiled identity of
> all industrial culture products can come triumphantly out into
> the open.[89]

Despite the fact that television was a relatively new technology, Adorno and Horkheimer realized the potential television held for those individuals and groups that had the ability to harness its power. Television provided a vehicle by which the culture industry could extend its reach to the home, where individuals could be distracted by incessant audio *and* video stimulation in the ongoing privatization of leisure time.

Theodor Adorno would later write that television became the leading tool of the culture industry because of its widespread usage and common themes. Adorno argues that, "The majority of television shows today aim at producing or at least reproducing, the very smugness, intellectual passivity and gullibility that seem to fit in with totalitarian creeds…I consider that the average television entertainment is fundamentally far more dangerous politically than any political broadcast has ever been."[90] Adorno saw television as maintaining and promulgating attitudes and values that reinforced structures of power and inequality in society. Again, for Adorno and Horkheimer, television, by its very nature, was a tool that could be used to influence mass opinion and inculcate the population to specific ideals that maintained the status quo.

Jürgen Habermas was a student of Adorno and Horkheimer during the 1950s and 1960s. Habermas followed Adorno and Horkheimer in arguing against a capitalist, market-driven social order. For Habermas, a liberal democracy is found in the free and

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[89] Ibid., 22.

[90] Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 165-166.

open interchange of ideas by all members of a given society. Habermas refers to this arena in which democratic exchange occurs as the "public sphere."[91] It is an arena in which all are free to participate, all ideas are heard and debated, and no one viewpoint is silenced before it can be debated. As Kellner argues, Habermas' intent was to mediate between the private interests of the individual and the demands of social and public life.[92]

Habermas has written extensively about the homogenization of his public sphere via mass media. Extending the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas argues that modern media, and especially television, limit the discourse broadcast to only that which has been sanctioned by the corporate entities that control media networks.[93] For Habermas, the media have been transformed from facilitating rational discourse and debate within the public sphere (beginning in the late 19th century) to shaping and limiting public discourse to only those ideas that are validated by the corporate owners of mass media.

Habermas forged an understanding of democracy linked with an emphasis on political participation. He envisioned democracy being realized in a space he called the "public sphere" where individuals engaged each other in ongoing participatory debate

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[91] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of the Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MA: MIT Press, 1989), 1-2.

[92] Kellner, *Television and The Crisis of Democracy*, 54.

[93] Jürgen Habermas, "The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society," in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader,* ed. Stephen Bronner and Douglas Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1989), 292-312.

over relevant issues.[94] In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas

argues that events and spaces are "public" when they are open to all the members of

society. In contrast, private events and spaces are closed, or exclusive affairs concerning

family and individual economic issues for example.[95] For Habermas, either the state or

the media can be counted as public organs if they serve the public interest, where the

public interest takes into consideration the interests and welfare of *all* the members of a

given society.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Habermas discusses the

transformation of the public press from a forum for debate to a private capitalistic

enterprise. Habermas argues that in the late 19th century, the press became

commercialized and the "threshold between the circulation of a commodity and the

exchange of communications among members of the public was leveled."[96] To this end,

the line between private and public was forever distorted. The press transformed from an

instrument for the open distribution of public opinion to "a business in pure news

reporting to one involving ideologies and viewpoints."[97] Reporting the news became

business, and the press was joined to both political and economic ends. During the

twentieth century, the reporting of the news was increasingly the business of television

networks.

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[94] Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader,* eds. Stephen Bronner and Douglas Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1989), 136-142.

[95] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of the Bourgeois Society*, 2-3.

[96] Ibid., 14.

[97] Ibid.

Habermas argued against the increasingly privatized forms of spectator politics in a capitalistic society where corporate entities increasingly control the public sphere via the distribution of mass media.[98] Habermas held that television networks were central to the control of the public sphere in the twentieth century. In a Habermasian sense, large economic organizations increasingly encroached upon the public sphere rendering citizens into consumers of goods, political doctrine, and spectacle via television and other mass media. While modern media has inherent potential for expanding one's communicative abilities, television provides for "one-way communication that is easily manipulated by structural controls."[99]

More recently, this notion is highlighted by former Vice President Al Gore who draws a connection between the collapse of shared public conversation and the rise of television's unidirectional flow of information.[100] For the most part, individuals can only receive television's message, they have little or no ability to communicatively counter those messages. Further, the majority of individuals have little opportunity to have their counter-message broadcast via modern television networks. A small number of individuals and large corporations continue to own the television networks and the production companies that produce television programming.

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[98] Douglas Kellner, "Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention." The article can be found online at www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/kellner.html. Last accessed 7/22/08.

[99] Jürgen Habermas, "The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society," in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader,* ed. Stephen Bronner and Douglas Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1989), 292-312.

[100] Al Gore, *The Assault on Reason* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 16.

The Medium and the Message

Coming on the heels of the Frankfurt School's work, Marshall McLuhan emerged as one of the twentieth century's leading critics of mass media technology. McLuhan wrote extensively about how the public interprets, experiences, and uses mass media, including television, radio, and print media. McLuhan gained fame initially as a literary critic, but he began writing about television at a time when television was a relatively new technology. McLuhan's writings on the rise of the television age remain important today as his argument stands apart from many other critiques of television. McLuhan's argument differs in that he believed that television could help individuals make sense of their world, and he supported the use of new media technologies in expanding our ability to communicate with and understand one another.

In his classic work *Understanding Media*, McLuhan argues that any new technology creates new associations and new circumstances.[101] In this sense, the consequence of any new media is simply that it extends one's relationships to other beings and other technologies. Mcluhan argues, "This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium-that is, of any extension of ourselves-result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology."[102] To McLuhan, the content of any emergent media was important simply because it created new connections among those individuals who were exposed to the new media. In this sense, television is an effective medium of communication because it forges new associations between disparate groups of people. In other words, a

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[101] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet, 1964), 23.

[102] Ibid.

study of television's content was not as important as a study of how television influenced the relationships of those who were exposed to it.

McLuhan argued that television forever changed our relation to the printed word as television forged in its viewers an ongoing desire for all-encompassing sensory experiences.[103] Where print media had historically offered a strictly visual and linear experience, television's integration of sight and sound rendered print media into a comparatively stale, one-dimensional medium. McLuhan argued that individuals, especially children, who are exposed to television at a young age have less interest in the printed word as words on a page simply cannot deliver the same sensory experience as television. Television's visual landscape changed human mental processes and created a longing for tactile interactions that are more engaging than those experienced with printed media. McLuhan offers that the "TV child encounters the world in a spirit antithetic to literacy."[104]

Although McLuhan saw television as adversarial to the development of literacy, he believed television could be an educational resource that would be beneficial to students. Because television provides for greater sensory experiences than the printed word, McLuhan argued that television illustrates the process and the growth of forms of all kinds in a manner unlike any other media. Contrary to the numerous scholars that came before and after him, McLuhan held that television could be used as an educational

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[103] Ibid., 268-269.

[104] Ibid. By literacy, McLuhan means the ability to decipher and comprehend the printed word. It could be argued today that there is a "media literacy" or "television literacy," McLuhan's point speaks to a traditional notion of literacy regarding reading and comprehending written texts.

tool that offered students an opportunity to have deeper sensory experiences with the natural world. Unlike the Frankfurt School scholars, who conceived of mass media as a tool of the governing class, McLuhan held that television would expand the general population's knowledge of each other and the world.

McLuhan's argument here lends itself to a discussion of how television can inform the population about things that they may not be able to experience first hand. Throughout the 20th century, television has been used to spread news of significant events such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War. In this sense, television can be understood as promoting the spread of information, which may have a positive influence on society. In this work I further explore the positive attributes of television programming and how Dewey's notions of communicative experience can inform this aspect of television in chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE

What Influence Does Television Have on Individuals?

In this chapter I discuss the literature that has been collected over the last sixty years in regard to whether or not television has an effect on viewers. I examine several of the leading schools of television research including effects research and cultivation analysis, a branch of effects research. My goal is to present a brief description of what has already been written about television's influence on human behavior before beginning a Deweyan critique of television in chapter four.

Effects research emerged in the 1960s as television was becoming a cultural feature of modern life in the United States. Early pioneers of effects research focused on whether or not television influenced its audience by conducting numerous surveys of television audiences. In other words, effects researchers asked the question, "What does television *do* to its audience?" Where McLuhan was convinced that the medium *was* the message (television's influence is simply that television exists and creates new connections), effects researchers were becoming increasingly concerned about the specific effects that the content of television programming had on viewers. By the mid-1960s, television was replacing print-media as the primary source of information and entertainment for much of the population and was therefore increasingly worthy of

critical investigation.[105] The fact that TV impacted society was becoming a given, but

questions of how, and to what degree it did so, had yet to be answered.

Cultivation Analysis

George Gerbner was an early proponent of a cultivation analysis model of effects

research that examined the effect that television programming has on society's

understanding of itself.[106] Gerbner's cultivation analysis model was born of his cultural

indicators project that attempted to extend effects research by concentrating on the long-

term effects of living with television.[107] Gerbner's model focused on whether television

viewing caused behavioral and emotional changes in viewers who regularly viewed

television programming.

Over the last 35 years, Gerbner and his colleagues in cultural indicators research

have found that television instructs quite well, regardless of whether or not the viewer

actually believes what they view. For example, the cultural indicators project found that

exposure to violence on television cultivates in the viewer a belief that the world is a

mean and dangerous place, a condition that Gerbner and his colleagues referred to as

"mean world syndrome."[108] In this model, television acts as teacher, shaping an

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[105] George Gerbner, "Cultivation Analysis: An Overview," *Mass Communication & Society* J (1998): *175-194.*

[106] Ibid.

[107] George Gerbner, "Toward Cultural Indicators: The Analysis of Mass Mediated Message Systems," *AV Communications Review* 17 (1969): 137-148.

[108] Nancy Signorelli, George Gerbner, and Michael Morgan, "Violence on Television: The Cultural Indicators Project," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 39, no. 2 (1995): 278-283.

individual's understanding of his or her reality to such a degree that the television

viewers understand their world as similar to the world presented on television. Where

McLuhan argues that individuals use television to satisfy a personal desire for

information or entertainment, Gerbner argues that television teaches viewers what to

desire and what to believe. Gerbner's position here recalls the culture industry concept

forged by the members of the Frankfurt School.

Following Gerbener, Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur posit a dependency model

regarding the influence that television has on individuals.[109] The authors argue that as

societies grow more complex, individuals feel a greater need to gather information about

the changing world and this greatly influences dependency on television for information.

In this sense, television's role as chief informant increased as the world grew larger, more

diverse, and more complicated. Recall McLuhan's argument that television is the

message simply because it exists. According to Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur television's

message not only informs society's growing diversity, it also leads to the ongoing growth

of diversity.[110] A need for deeper sensory experiences leads people to seek out people and

situations unlike themselves. This position follows McLuhan's argument that television

led individuals to seek out new things previously unknown to them. The dependency

model holds that the seeking of new experiences *is* television's effect.

In the past twenty-five years, numerous scholars have furthered the arguments of

the Frankfurt School in questioning the role that television plays in undermining

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[109] Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach and Melvin L. DeFleur, "A Dependency Model of Mass Media Effects," *Communication Research* 3 (1976): 3-20.

[110] Ibid.

democratic interaction among individuals.[111] These scholars contend that television, by its very nature, limits democratic exchange of ideas between disparate groups of people. As a limited number of individuals have control over the content of television programming, and far fewer have the ability to create television programming, the greater majority of the population is receivers of whatever information television puts forth. In this sense, television can be understood as eroding democracy as it limits the number of voices that can use its power to communicate an idea or message. Further, television does not encourage debate; television puts forth positions with which viewers cannot meaningfully engage.

Douglas Kellner writes of a hegemonic model of television which asserts that the images and information privileged on television are engineered to foster conformity to the norms of the dominant culture while limiting democratic exchange.[112] Kellner, borrowing from the Frankfurt School, asserts that television, as a form of communication technology, serves the interests of the governing class who have access to harness television's power. In this sense, television can be used to keep people distracted and misinformed about political, cultural, and economic issues.[113] People who are distracted by television's mindless amusement or misinformed by its controlled stream of

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[111] See, for example, Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, and Chomsky and Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*.

[112] Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, 17.

[113] Ibid.

propaganda are less likely to engage in inquiry that may challenge established power structures. Therefore, Kellner argues, television reinforces the status quo while silencing opposition movements by limiting that which is broadcast and distributed.[114] Without the ability to shape that which is broadcast, viewers of television are passive receivers of that which is offered by those in control of television networks.

Kellner's critiques of television follow the work of Jerry Mander who argues that television, by its very nature, limits the democratic exchange of ideas. Mander holds that television is contrary to democratic interaction as television primarily promotes listening over speaking and watching over doing.[115] Television sets the agenda that the viewer must follow. Consider the following passage from Mander's book, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*:

> The fourth argument demonstrates that television has no democratic potential. The technology itself places absolute limits on what may pass through it. The medium, in effect, chooses its own content from a very narrow field of possibilities.[116]

Mander's notion here is similar to McLuhan's argument that the medium is the message; yet, Mander's conception of television's message contradicts McLuhan's. To Mander, the message is not one of interconnectivity, but, rather, disconnection and exclusivity. Said differently, television presents a narrow view of reality, a view that is shaped by the select few individuals who control television programming.

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[114] Ibid.

[115] Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television.*

[116] Ibid., 100. Mander contends that television is undemocratic by its very nature. It represents a unidirectional flow of mediated messages that viewers cannot debate with to any effect.

Children and Television

When television was still in its infancy, early television researchers found that television watching by children replaced activities that were once deemed more intellectually stimulating, such as reading and participating in community clubs and activities.[117] Jerry Mander argues that the lack of interaction inherent in television watching by young people promotes isolation from real beings while deadening mental activity.[118] As early as the 1950s, critics were waging a campaign against television and its influence on school-aged children.[119] In 1965, television critic Harry Skornia commented on television's negative influence on social activity and community interaction:

> One of the most disturbing effects of television appears
> to be the creation, in some people, of passivity. Social
> scientists point to endless hours, night after night, year
> after year, spent before television sets, consuming, drinking
> in, and vegetating. By taking the citizen away from
> public affairs-town meetings, citizen councils, neighborhood
> groups, church and discussion groups-how many vital
> functions of our nation have been dried up by television?[120]

Skornia argues that television induces both passivity and catharsis in young people and asserts that television, "brought about a change in the status of the 'idler' in society."[121]

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[117] Hilde T. Himmelweit and Paul Vince, *Television and the Child* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 20-21.

[118] Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television,* 200.

[119] Robert Louis Shayon, *Television and Our Children* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1951).

[120] Harry J. Skornia, *Television and Society* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 176.

[121] Ibid., 177.

In an age that is increasingly focused on trivialities, one who loafs in front of a television, Skornia argues, may be admired for his or her knowledge of popular culture and celebrities.[122]

These early critics saw television eroding the public life that had been at the core of the American experience in the early 20th century. With television providing in-home distraction and entertainment the public engaged in fewer community-based activities, spent less time interacting with one another, and were less engaged in making decisions that affected their communities. This decline in community interaction wrought by television has lead to the loss of what Robert Putnam refers to as "social capital."[123] Putman defines social capital as "the networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."[124] He ties the decline in social capital, as well as the decline in community interaction throughout the late twentieth century to the popularity of television. With television, citizens were more likely to remain at home, more likely to isolate themselves in front of the television, and less likely to engage in associations with others in a community activities.[125] Television, with its in-home,

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[122] Ibid.

[123] Robert Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6 (January 1995): 65-78. The article is available online at http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/assoc/bowling.html. Last accessed 7/17/08.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid. Putnam's research includes data on the falling rates of participation in community activities such as Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, school board meetings, civic groups, and bowling leagues. Participation in all such groups has been in steady decline since the late 1950s.

privatized and individualized entertainment, forever changed the way individuals interact in the community.

More recent arguments about television's effects on human behavior have examined how people, especially young people, understand television. Considering that commercial television is one of the main transmitters of youth culture, influencing everything from patterns of speech, fashion, ritual, and social norms,[126] it is important to note that children and adolescents are often confused by what television presents. Maxine Greene argues that children and adolescents are unable to interpret their own reality in relation to media images and cannot separate themselves from what television offers as an official reality.[127] Lacking the ability to effectively interpret television programming leads young people to be more susceptible than adults to that which television offers.

Regarding young people's ability to decipher television programming and advertising, Victor Strasburger argues that young people demonstrate an inability to interpret and comprehend the complex messages imbedded in television programming and advertising.[128] While most adults understand that much of what is presented on non-news programming on television is fantasy, most children are unable to make a distinction between reality and what television presents as real. Moreover, unlike adults

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[126] Ann De Vaney, "Introduction," in *Watching Channel One: The Convergence of Students, Technology, and Private Business*, ed. Ann De Vaney (Albany: NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 1-19.

[127] Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), 45.

[128] See Victor C. Strasburger, "Children and TV Advertising: Nowhere to Run, Nowhere to Hide," *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* 22 (May 2005): 185-187.

who often change channels during advertisements, most children watch television advertisements and often confuse advertising with programming.[129]

In his research regarding *Channel One,* the company that installs televisions in public schools for "free" in exchange for broadcasting advertisements on those televisions, and the influence that television commercials have on high school students, Roy Fox found that television commercials do "penetrate students' language and thinking."[130] The majority of high school students in Fox's study were unable to critically evaluate the advertisements they viewed and most did not realize that the ads were created to get them to act in specific ways. In one example from Fox's research, only 5 of 150 students were able to understand the motives behind *Pepsi* advertisements, as the majority did not realize the ad was designed to get them to want to buy more *Pepsi.* Moreover, many of the students in Fox's study felt that the advertisements they viewed were designed with the students' best interest in mind and not for the benefit of the advertisers. From the results of Fox's study, it is clear that television did influence the behaviors of the students who viewed the *Channel One* programming, a finding that validates many of the concerns of the effects researchers.

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[129] Barber, *Consumed,* 233.

[130] Roy F. Fox, *Harvesting Minds: How TV Commercials Control Kids* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996). Fox examined the impact that *Channel One* commercials had on 200 high school students who were exposed to *Channel One* in their Missouri high schools. See also Nancy Nelson Knupfer and Peter Hayes, "The Effects of the Channel One Broadcast on Students' Knowledge of Current Events," in *Watching Channel One: The Convergence of Students, Technology, and Private Business*, ed. Ann De Vaney (Albany: NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 42-60, for a similar study in which it was found that students who were exposed to *Channel One* programming remembered only the advertisements presented, not the "educational" content of the broadcast.

Holding with previous arguments regarding television viewing inducing passivity and isolation, current research indicates that television viewing leads to less interaction between family members and also stunts young people's creativity.[131] Further, studies have shown that television viewing diminishes mental activity and negatively influences school performance.[132] This point is highlighted in a 2004 article by Nary Shin which links television watching by adolescents to passivity, laziness, and poor academic performance.[133] In Shin's research, adolescents who watched more than two hours of television per day had lower test scores, poorer grades, and lower graduation rates than peers who watched less television. Further, the same adolescents demonstrated less interest in community and extra-curricular activities.

As we move into the twenty-first century, pediatricians, psychologists, and scholars continue to warn of the negative influence television viewing has on the healthy

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[131] Elizabeth A. Vandewater, David S. Bickham, and June H. Lee, "Time Well Spent? Relating Television Use to Children's Free-Time Activities," *Pediatrics* 117, no.2 (February 2006): 181-190.

[132] Iman Sharif and James D. Sargent, "Association Between Television, Movie, and Video Game Exposure and School Performance," *Pediatrics* 118, no.4 (October 2006): 1061-1070. See also Robert J. Hancox, Barry Milne, and Richie Poulton, "Association of Television Viewing During Childhood with Poor Education Achievement," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 159 (July 2005): 614-618.

[133] Nary Shin, "Exploring Pathways from Television Viewing to Academic Achievement in School Age Children," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 165 (December 2004): 367-382. Shin's argument regarding television induced passivity is not a new one. See also Ronald Kubey and Mihalyi Czikzentmilhalyi, *Television and the Quality of Life* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates), and Jerome L. Singer, "The Power and Limits of Television: A Cognitive-Affective Analysis," in *The Entertainment Function of Television*, ed. P. Tannenbaum (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1980), 353-396.

development of children and adolescents.[134] From decreased physical activity, to poor

school performance, to an increase in violence and risk-taking in adolescents, the direct

and indirect influence of television on children and adolescents is cause for ongoing

investigation.[135] Further, a study from 2006 showed that early television viewing by

children under the age of two may be an early trigger for autism.[136] This line of research

is important as it delineates a difference between television's influence on children and

adults. Children and teenagers process television differently than adults and often cannot

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[134] See, for example, Daheia Barr-Anderson, Patricia van den Berg, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, and Mary Story, "Characteristics Associated with Older Adolescents Who Have a Television in Their Bedrooms," *Pediatrics* 121, no. 4 (April 2008): 718-724; Dimitri Christakis and Frederick J. Zimmerman, "Violent Television Viewing During Preschool is Associated with Antisocial Behavior During School Age," *Pediatrics* 120, no. 5 (November 2007): 993-999; Lisa Powell, Geln Szczypka, Frank Chaloupka, and Carol Braunschweig, "Nutritional Content of Television Food Advertisements Seen by Children and Adolescents in the United states," *Pediatrics* 120, no.3 (August 2007): 576-584; and Hancox, et al., "Association of Television Viewing During Childhood with Poor Education Achievement," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 159 (July 2005): 614-618. For further discussion on the connection between viewing violence on television and an increase in violence and risk taking in adolescents and children who watch violence on television see Marina Krcmar and Kathryn Greene, "Connections Between Violent Television Exposure and Adolescent Risk Taking," *Media Psychology* 2 (2000): 195-217; and Christakis and Zimmerman, "Violent Television Viewing During Preschool is Associated with Antisocial Behavior During School Age."

[135] Victor Strasburger, *Adolescents and the Media: Medical and Psychological Impact* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), and Jeffrey Johnson, Patricia Cohen, Stephanie Kasen, and Judith Brook, "Extensive Television Viewing and the Development of Attention and Learning Difficulties During Adolescence," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 161 (May 2007): 480-486.

[136] Waldman, Michael, Sean Nicholson, and Nodir Adilov, "Does Television Cause Autism?" *National Bureau of Economic Research*, working paper no. 12632. Last accessed July 31, 2008 at http://econpapers.repec.org/paper/nbrnberwo/12632.htm.

decipher the messages contained in television programming.[137] In this sense, television

studies should treat children as a unique audience that experiences the influence of

television in different, and perhaps, more concerning ways than adults. Considering the

growing body of literature regarding television's place in modern life, it is difficult to

dismiss television studies as anachronistic despite the fact that it is just one

communication technology in an increasingly media-saturated world. In fact, despite the

rise of new communication technologies, research has shown that new media is not

displacing television as the most popular media in the lives of most Americans.[138]

Moreover, most children today are increasingly proficient at using more than one media

source at the same time.[139]

 Contrary to the work of the effects researchers presented earlier in this chapter,

television critic Ron Lembo argues for young viewer as active participants in meaning

making with television. In his book *Thinking Through Television*, Ron Lembo asserts that

young television viewers are active participants in the viewing process, working to make

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[137] See, for example, Strasburger, *Adolescents and the Media: Medical and Psychological Impact*; Budd, et al., *Consuming Environments: Television and Commercial Culture*; and Fox, *Harvesting Minds: How TV Commercials Control Kids.*

[138] Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Elisabeth Donahue, "Introduction: Children and Electronic Media," *The Future of Children 18*, no.1 (Spring 2008): 3-10 See also Jeff Cohen, *Cable New Confidential: My Misadventures in Corporate Media*; and Andrew Wallenstein, "TV Viewership Hits Record High."

[139] Brooks-Gunn and Elisabeth Donahue, "Introduction: Children and Electronic Media." The authors find that over the past ten years, youth continue to consume more and more media, but they do so without letting go of older media like TV. Instead, most young people today are increasingly proficient at "media multitasking," a term the authors use to refer to the use of more than one communication media simultaneously. For instance, most young people in this study reported using a computer and cell phone while also watching television.

meaning of what it is viewed and relating it to real-life situations.[140] Lembo argues that past television research has focused on a top-down effects model that ignores the fact that children and adolescents engage with television and use its content as needed in their personal and social lives. Similarly, research has shown that children who watch television with friends are more likely to engage socially in other activities away from the television.[141] In this sense, while television may not promote activity, it does not always prevent activity from occurring.

Television as Teacher

For as long as television has been part of the American landscape, scholars, educators, and medical experts have argued over the degree of influence that popular media has on individuals. As Robert McChesney argues, "The first myth is that media do not matter that much-that they merely reflect reality, rather than shape it."[142] McChesney debunks this myth in asserting that media are a social force that influences attitudes, beliefs and values. Holding with McChesney, Henry Giroux asserts:

> At issue for parents, educators, and others is how culture, especially
> media culture, has become a substantial, if not the primary, educational
> force in regulating the meanings, values, and tastes that set the norms
> that offer up and legitimate particular subject positions-what it means to
> claim an identity as a male, female, white, black, citizen, noncitizen.[143]

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[140] Ron Lembo, *Thinking Through Television* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[141] David Bickham and Michael Rich, "Is Television Viewing Associated with Social Isolation," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 160, no. 4 (April 2006): 387-2392.

[142] McChesney, *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century*, 7-8.

Giroux holds that media culture is a leading force in the education of young people today. It is through communication media that many young people learn about others for the first time. It is through media that young people receive messages about how to dress, how to act, which experiences are valued, and which are dismissed as less than desirable. Said differently, modern communication media influence the development of young people's norms and values.

More recently, Esposito and Love hold that children and adolescents learn from popular media in its various forms such as music, movies, and television.[144] These scholars argue, rightly so, that popular media offer young people opportunities to learn about themselves and others by exposing the unfamiliar. The modern landscape is crowded with numerous sources of media technology that often open doors to things that are previously unknown. Understanding media as instructive recalls McLuhan's belief that media are educative tools through which human beings increase their understanding of each other and the world.

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[143] Henry Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 2-3.

[144] Jennifer Esposito and Bettina Love, "More Than a Video Ho: Hip Hop as a Site of Sex Education about Girls' Sexual Desire,"in *The Corporate Assault on Youth: Commercialism, Exploitation, and the End of Innocence,* ed. Deron Boyles (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 27-50. For more on how media influence young people's attitudes and beliefs, see Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media, and the Ideological Effect," in *Mass Communication and Society*, eds. James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979), 315-348; and Victor Strasburger, "Clueless: Why Do Pediatricians Underestimate the Media's Influence on Children and Adolescents?" *Pediatrics* 117, no. 4 (2006): 1427-1431. It should be noted, Strasburger asserts, that adolescents believe the media influences everyone but themselves, something he calls the "third-person effect."

The argument for television as an educative tool is contrary to much of the research cited in chapter two that decries television programming as increasing passivity, mental apathy, and isolation. When one thinks of education, notions of passivity and apathy do not come to the forefront as characteristics that one would strive for in educational experiences. Can television be both an inducer of passivity and an ideal educator? Education, as I argue in greater detail later, should be marked by inquiry, activity and experience. The idea of television as teacher is contrary to the realization of those ideals. Television also lies contrary, as I discuss in detail in the next chapter, to Deweyan notions of experience, knowledge, and democracy.

When considering television as teacher, it has been argued that the teaching that television does is not always an intended consequence. As Amy Gutmann argues:

> Television teaches without really trying, and without parents really intending that their children learn what television teaches. The most significant educational effects of television are probably not its deliberately educational purposes. Even, or perhaps especially, when television does not aim to educate, it conveys a popular culture that influences children's attitudes not only about learning, but much more generally, about what kind of life is worth living.[145]

In Gutmann's assertion, television teaches without always having a scripted curriculum or special focus. Television teaches without education being its primary focus. Said differently, television's influence lies beyond its *prima facie* content, its influence is its ongoing transmission of cultural norms and values.

The argument for television as teacher is not a new one. As early as the late 1940s, television was already seen as having potential as an educative tool.[146] Early

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[145] Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 245.

proponents of television as educator saw the rapid widespread distribution of visual

information via television as a breakthrough for training and educating vast numbers of

children simultaneously.[147] Robert Lee, a television critic and writer exclaimed in the

mid-1940s that television would work "side by side" with the public school teacher to

form the educational "team of the future."[148] Murray Bolen, a producer and director of

radio and television programs, went so far as to call television the "greatest tool for the

children of any generation."[149] Bolen and Lee argued that television programming would

enliven students' formal education through greater detail and description.

In the late 1960's, *Sesame Street* became the first children's show designed

specifically as an educational program designed to expose preschool children to

curricular content.[150] *Sesame Street* was born of a partnership between the *Carnegie*

Commission on Educational Television (CCET), the *Children's Television Workshop*

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[146] For several early discussions on television as an educative tool, see Murray Bolen, *Fundamentals of Television* (Hollywood, CA: Hollywood Radio Publishers, 1950); William Eddy, *Television: The Eyes of Tomorrow* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1944); and Luther Gable, *The Miracle of Television*.

[147] Bolen, *Fundamentals of Television*, 241.

[148] Robert Lee, *Television: The Revolution* (New York: Essential Books, 1944), 133. It should be noted that in Lee's vision, the school teacher would compliment the "eminent authority" of the television personality. It should also be noted that Lee was a television critic who went on to have a profitable career as a producer and director of television programming.

[149] Bolen, *Fundamentals of Television*, 242.

[150] June H. Lee and Aletha C. Huston, "Educational Televisual Media Effects," in *The Faces of Televisual Media: Teaching, Violence, Selling to Children,* eds. Edward L. Palmer and Brian M. Young (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 83-106. See also Robin Moss, "A Short History of the Window of the World," in *The Faces of Televisual Media: Teaching, Violence, Selling to Children*, eds. Edward L. Palmer and Brian M. Young (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 43-54.

(CTW), and the educational vision of Gerald Lesser, a Harvard professor of Education and Developmental Psychology.[151] The partnership was created over ongoing concern regarding the influence that television had on children, as well as a growing belief that preschool children needed further preparation for formal education.[152] Educational television was seen as a remedy for both of these issues.

Lloyd Morrisett, a communications professor and founder of CTW, believed that television should become a partner with families and schools in the education of children.[153] Morrisett wrote, "The real answer to the problems of early education is for the total culture of childhood, including television as an important element, to work in harmony with the family and later the school."[154] Morrisett held that television's ability to reach a large number of children simultaneously was one way to expose children who did not have access to preschool services to educational content in a safe and effective manner.

The proposals for educational programming on television were in line with President Lyndon Johnson's ongoing efforts to prepare disadvantaged children for school, which also included the development of Head Start programs. Gerald Lesser furthered Morrisett's argument in adding that television was "an ideal educator," and that

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[151] Joan Cooney, "Foreword," in Gerald Lesser, *Children and Television: Lessons from Sesame Street* (New York: Vintage, 1975), xxi.

[152] Joel Spring, *The American School: 1642-2000* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 379.

[153] Lloyd Morrisett, "Introduction," in Gerald Lesser, *Children and Television: Lessons from Sesame Street (*New York: Vintage, 1975), xxi.

[154] Ibid.

it was also "nonpunitive, and provided a shelter from the emotional stress of society."[155] Lesser was a leading voice in the argument that the American education system was not doing enough to forge social change and believed that *Sesame Street's* educational programming could lead children to embrace a new vision of a more equitable society, while also providing them with a safe escape from the stressors of everyday life.

Sesame Street was the first professionally produced program designed especially to both help prepare children for school entertain them with safe and age-appropriate content.[156] However, while it received a great deal of support from scholars and medical professionals, it was controversial from its inception. The use of television as an educational tool was contrary to the previous charges that claimed it was a passive and "mind-numbing experience."[157] Lesser countered these arguments by asserting that learning takes place through modeling, something television offered its viewers.[158] Further, other scholars have asserted that passivity and mental apathy lie in the child viewer, not the television programming itself.[159]

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[155] Spring, *The American School*, 377.

[156] Marie E. Schmidt and Daniel R. Anderson, "The Impact of Television on Cognitive Development and Educational Achievement," in *Children and Television: Fifty Years of Research*, eds. Norma Pecora, John P. Murray and Ellen Ann Wartella (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 65-84.

[157] Spring, *The American School*, 381.

[158] Gerald Lesser, *Children and Television: Lessons from Sesame Street (*New York: Vintage, 1975), 5.

[159] Milton Chen, "Computers in the Lives of Our Children: Looking Back on a Generation of Television Research," in *The New Media: Communication, Research, and Technology*, ed. Robert Rice (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984), 269-286. See also Aletha C. Huston, David S. Bickham, June H. Lee and John C. Wright, "From Attention to

While Neil Postman has argued that *Sesame Street* did not teach children to love knowledge, but rather, to love television,[160]studies have shown that children who watched *Sesame Street* showed greater vocabulary development than peers who were not exposed to the programming.[161] Further, numerous studies have shown television viewing of specific programming as having a positive effect on the social and emotional development of children.[162] However, there is recent research that has shown that children learn more from adults than they do television and that television may be too fast-paced and visual confusing for children to learn anything from television programming.[163] Regardless of the influence that *Sesame Street*, and a multitude of other,

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Comprehension: How Children Watch and Learn from Television," in *Children and Television: Fifty Years of Research,* eds. Norma Pecora, John P. Murray and Ellen Ann Wartella (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 41-61.

[160] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 50-51.

[161] Aletha C. Huston, David S. Bickham, June H. Lee and John C. Wright, "From Attention to Comprehension: How Children Watch and Learn from Television," in *Children and Television: Fifty Years of Research*, eds. Norma Pecora, John P. Murray and Ellen Ann Wartella (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 41-61. See also June H. Lee and Aletha C. Huston, "Educational Televisual Media Effects."

[162] See, for example, Jerome Singer and Dorothy Singer, "The Power and Limitations of Television: A Cognitive-Affective Analysis," in *The Entertainment Function of Television,* ed. Paul Tannenbaum (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, 1980), 31-65; Mary Mares and Emory Woodard, "Prosocial Effects on Children's Social Interactions," in *Handbook of Children and the Media*, eds. Dorothy Singer and Jerome Singer (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 183-205; and Shalom Fisch and Rosemary Truglio, *"G" is For Growing: Thirty Years of Research on Children and Sesame Street* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, 2001).

[163] Maria Krcmar, Bernard Grela and Kirten Lin, "Can Toddlers Learn Vocabulary from Television? An Experimental Approach," *Media Psychology* 10 (2007): 41-63. This study examined vocabulary acquisition in toddlers. The researched showed that toddlers are more likely to learn vocabulary from an adult than from television programming that purports to provide educational content. The study found that

more modern examples of "educational" television has on intellectual and emotional

development, television undermines the idea of schooling if we follow Postman's

argument. Unlike the daily routines most young people will experience in a school

setting, television presents an uncomplicated, unchallenging wave of visual stimulation

that regardless of its content, is centered on making things fun.

In this chapter I examined the historical and current writings and research

regarding television's influence on human beings. These critiques range from the work of

academicians and scholars to medical professionals. Regardless of whether one sees

television as a positive or negative influence on human behavior, it is clear that television

does influence the way human beings interact with each other and the natural world. In

chapter four I discuss how John Dewey's writings on experience, knowledge, and

democracy, as well his writings on mass media and communication technology can

contribute to an ongoing critique of television.

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television may be too stimulating and entertaining for toddlers to actually have beneficial
learning experiences with television.

CHAPTER FOUR

John Dewey and Television

The volume of literature written about television is staggering, and it is still growing as television viewing continues to increase despite the rise of the internet and other communication technologies.[164] While chapters two and three have focused on the numerous studies regarding television and its influence on modern life conducted in the past fifty years, there has not yet been a critique of television that focuses on John Dewey's philosophy in relation to television. Based on his writings concerning communication media and their influence on the public, it is hard to imagine that Dewey would not have investigated and written about television if he had lived to experience it further. In this chapter, I extend the body of research regarding television by grounding my work in several of Dewey's philosophical frameworks.

To situate Dewey in the stream of literature already written about television, I examine how Dewey's ideas support and contradict that literature. For the thrust of this dissertation, I rely on Dewey's theories of experience, knowledge, and democracy to extend the field of television studies. I do not wish to place Dewey inside of pre-determined conceptual frameworks regarding television studies. To do this would be to corrupt the very nature of Deweyan philosophy which holds that inquiry and experimentation do not rely on existing notions of truth, but moves into new and

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[164] See, for example, Jeff Cohen, *Cable New Confidential: My Misadventures in Corporate Media* (Sausalito, CA: Polipoint Press, 2006), and Andrew Wallenstein, "TV Viewership Hits Record High," *Reuters* (9/22/06).

previously unexplored territory. I believe that Dewey's theories resonate with much of what has been written about television previously, but I also believe that Dewey's philosophy can extend our understanding of television in myriad new ways. Before examining television through a Deweyan lens, I briefly outline the timeline of Dewey's life in relation to television and other communication technology.

Dewey's Life and Times

John Dewey was born in Burlington, Vermont in October 1859 during the nascent days of the industrial revolution. It was also the dawn of the Civil War and Burlington was a rugged and rural New England farm town that had been settled by English and Scottish settlers nearly 100 years earlier.[165] Unlike assumed notions of pastoral nineteenth century New England, the Burlington Dewey knew as a child was not egalitarian and without social strife.[166] The Burlington of Dewey's childhood had for twenty years been the center of commerce and activity for Vermont; it was a vibrant and diverse city that gave Dewey his first glimpse of democracy amidst growing industrialization and urbanization.[167] Many of the issues Dewey would concern himself with throughout his adult life, such as class and race relations, the challenge of participatory democracy, and the need for communicative experience, were present in nineteenth century Vermont.

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[165] Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 33.

[166] Alan Ryan, J*ohn Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: Norton and Company, 1995), 43-44.

[167] Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 1-3.

Dewey spent his childhood and adolescent years in Burlington, and enrolled in the University of Vermont in 1875 before he was 16 years old. He graduated four years later before the age of nineteen, although his years at Vermont are not marked by any notable achievements. As Alan Ryan argues, Dewey kept a low-profile at Vermont, but did manage to graduate second in his class, and left Vermont with a sense that "philosophy ought to save the world."[168] At this early point in his career, Dewey already held that philosophy should serve to make the world a better, more livable place. It was Dewey's contention throughout his life that philosophy was the work not of experts, but any individual who engages in inquiry to develop a deeper understanding of life.

Much of Dewey's early writings are steeped in the pastoral Christian ideals of nineteenth century New England. Dewey was raised in a strict Christian household; his mother Lucina often asking the Dewey children if they were "right with Jesus."[169] Dewey's young life was steeped in Christian notions of service, peace, and piety, all things his mother stressed to all of her children. Throughout his life, Dewey would wrestle with the ideas and interactions between religion and philosophy. While he was an ardent Christian who often organized Christian student associations in college, Dewey quickly adopted a more secularized notion of philosophy as the key to a healthy society once he left school and his parents' world in Burlington. His notion of secular philosophy as a relevant technology of the common man is something that Dewey carried with him throughout his adult life.

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[168] Ryan, J*ohn Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism,* 61-62.

[169] Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 21.

After Vermont, Dewey went on to hold positions at the University of Michigan, Columbia University and the University of Chicago.[170] Throughout his academic life, Dewey was a prolific writer, authoring numerous volumes on myriad topics that ranged from aesthetics and religion, to curriculum and pedagogy, and mass communication. When he died in 1952, he was widely regarded as the greatest American philosopher of all time and the father of progressive education in the United States.[171] His impact as a philosopher and educator has waned slightly in the latter part of the twentieth century, but the last decade of the twentieth century saw a slight rebirth in the interest in Dewey.

Throughout his life, Dewey held an optimistic view of the general public's ability to face the challenges of the evolving, modern world in which they lived. Dewey can be seen as optimist, he believed in the potentiality and ingenuity of human beings, and in the creativity of individuals and the power of a collective will. As Alan Ryan argues:

> He was a curious visionary, because he did not speak of a distant goal or a city not built with hands. He was a visionary about the here and now, about the potentiality of the modern world, modern man, and thus, as it happened, America and Americans in the twentieth century. He addressed public concerns and avowable interests more adequately than he addressed the secrets of the heart and our unavowable private interests; but he will remain for the foreseeable future a rich source of intellectual nourishment for anyone not absolutely locked within the anxieties of his or her own heart and not absolutely despondent about the prospects of the modern world. [172]

Ryan's praise for Dewey speaks the optimism that permeates much of Dewey's philosophy. A philosophy grounded in the belief that individuals, through active

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[170] Ibid.

[171] Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 19.

[172] Ibid., 369.

engagement with others and the surrounding environment, could shape the world in such a manner that all people could live free and enriching lives.

John Dewey lived during a time of incredible change and growth in the United States. He was born just before the start of the Civil War and lived through the Great Depression and two World Wars. The years during which Dewey lived were marked not only by global unrest, but also by rapid technological and industrial growth. While Dewey was in elementary school, the innovations of the industrial age were being felt in the United States, noted in such advances as the first transcontinental railroad created when the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads were joined in 1869, and the invention of the telephone and electric light bulb in the 1870s.

In keeping with his belief in philosophy informing present activity, Dewey responded to the technological and industrial changes around him throughout his life. As Larry Hickman argues, Dewey formed many of his philosophical ideas in response to the problems generated from living in a developing technological society.[173] Dewey's first essay was published in 1882, when Thomas Edison was designing the first hydroelectric plant in Wisconsin, and he died in 1952 shortly after the rise of television and the development of atomic and hydrogen bombs.[174] Dewey's responses to the technological advances around him are seen throughout his works where he engages in constant struggle to make sense of technology and its influence on modern life.

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[173] Larry Hickman, *John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1990), 1.

[174] Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 30.

Throughout Dewey's early adult life, the country was changing from an agrarian society to an industrialized nation, due in large part to advanced technological and mechanical innovation. Unlike many leading philosophers of his time, including William James and C.S. Peirce, Dewey engaged with issues that were relevant to the times in which he lived.[175] Recall Dewey's notion that philosophy ought to save the world. In this sense, Dewey saw philosophy and technology as interrelated concepts that influenced the ways in which humans experience the world. For Dewey, philosophy required ongoing investigation into those issues that shaped the daily lives of the common individual. During his lifetime, technology was increasingly shaping the way human beings interacted with and experienced each other and the world. To this end, Dewey continued to engage with relevant issues of technology and industrialization that influenced the world in which he lived.

John Dewey's Philosophy

At the core of Dewey's philosophy is his belief that human beings continually interact with each other and the world. As Alan Ryan argues, John Dewey's belief in pragmatism stems from his holding that "organisms bring meaning into the world."[176] For Dewey, human beings, not some supernatural force or deity make meaning of an ever-changing world. In defining American pragmatism, Dewey writes, "Pragmatism and experimentalism bring into prominence the importance of the individual. It is he who is

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[175] Ibid., 3.

[176] Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 126.

the carrier of creative thought, the author of action, and of its application."[177] Pragmatism

requires that individuals be free to be just that: individuals. Pragmatism requires that

human beings engage with the world around them by bringing creative energy to present

day problems and obstacles.

Dewey holds that individuals come to understand the world around them via

experiences that take place in present time. Those experiences and interactions were born

out of a need to solve some current problem or tension. As Alan Ryan argues

> An organism that had no needs, and therefore experienced no
> tension between what it was after and what it had, would be an
> organism with no knowledge of its environment at all, hardly
> distinguishable from its surroundings. Dewey's vision of the
> situation that all organisms found themselves in, and human beings
> more than any other, was that of making demands on an environment,
> being constantly checked, thrown back on themselves, forced to think
> their approach to the environment, and then trying again.[178]

It was through these ongoing trials that human beings learn, grow, and adapt to an ever-

changing world. Without movement toward the finding of a solution to some problem,

human beings become static organisms having no need for experience or the acquisition

of knowledge.

John Dewey believed in living in the here and now and in the practical application

of knowledge gained through active, ongoing inquiry. Dewey believed that inquiry takes

place when human beings face specific needs and wants that are relative to present

activities. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey writes

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[177] John Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism," in *The Later Works of John Dewey, v.2: 1925-1927*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1991), 20.

[178] Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 128.

> We always live at the time we live and not some other time, and only
> by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present
> experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future.
> This is the only preparation which in the long run amounts to anything."[179]

Dewey held that present experience was the cornerstone for the development of ongoing

knowledge claims, where knowledge represents obstacles that are faced and conquered.

The accumulation of knowledge claims affords one the ability to interact in social

arrangements where past experiences facilitate the growth of both the individual and the

community.

Dewey's concern with experience pervades much of his professional work. Recall

Dewey's notion that experience is paramount to the development of knowledge, which

allows individuals to interact together in a democratic society. For Dewey, experience

involves activity, a moving toward some goal or perceived need. He argues in *Art as*

Experience that, "Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature

and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living."[180] Said differently,

living involves interaction; living is more active than passive, it is more a participatory

event than a spectator activity.

In this dissertation I hold, following Dewey, that living involves action, it requires

movement towards obstacles to be overcome. There are ongoing experiences that

progress toward summation, upon which new obstacles are generated and the process

begins again. As Dewey asserts in *Art as Experience*, "Experience is the result, the sign,

and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried

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[179] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1938/1997), 14.

[180] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigree Books, 1934/1980), 35.

to the full, is transformation of interaction into participation and communication."[181]

Dewey furthers this point later in *Art as Experience* when he asserts:

> A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem
> receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that
> of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation,
> writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out
> that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is
> a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency.
> It is *an* experience.[182]

As I have highlighted in this chapter, for Dewey, experience is living, it is an

active process, filled with chance, experimentation, and ongoing interactions. Moreover,

living is the process of doing something, of moving in directions in solving current

predicaments. Consider the following from Dewey's *Reconstruction in Philosophy*:

> Experience becomes an affair primarily of doing. The organism does
> not stand about Micawbe-like, waiting for something to turn up. It does
> not wait passive and inert for something to impress itself upon it from
> without. The living creature undergoes, suffers, the consequences of its
> own behavior. This close connection between doing and suffering or
> undergoing forms what we call experience. Disconnected doing and
> disconnected suffering are neither of them experiences.[183]

For Dewey, when there is no connected interaction, there is no experience, no real living.

Thriving organisms do not simply conform to conditions; instead, they actively change

and evolve in accordance to needs encountered through ongoing interactions. Dewey

does also draw distinctions between various types of experiences stating that an

experience can simply be something "experienced" without leading to active knowing.[184]

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[181] Ibid., 22.

[182] Ibid., 35.

[183] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 86.

John Dewey and Community

Dewey believed that all human beings should have the opportunity to be both individuals with unique identities and strengths, as well as members of a community sharing common beliefs and goals. Community, for Dewey, is "the *process* of associating in such ways that experience, ideas, emotion, values are transmitted and made common."[185] In a Deweyan sense, communities are, as Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy assert, "organic wholes," where individuals whose "different and unique parts contribute essentially and vitally to shared goals."[186] Dewey's notion of community requires that individuals contribute meaningfully to the overall health of the community by being active in a public sphere where there are no owners, only members.[187] For Dewey, a community does not just tolerate difference; a community understands that only when diverse groups of people come together can the whole community thrive.

Dewey's community is grounded on the interaction and association of free individuals, a notion of community that is rooted in the idea of cultural pluralism. Following the ideas of Isaiah Berlin, cultural pluralism is found wherever difference is embraced as a means by which individuals learn to live peacefully with one another.[188]

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[184] John Dewey, *Essays in Experimental Logic* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1916), 3-4.

[185] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 207. Italics in original.

[186] Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Challenge of Classroom Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998), 61.

[187] Jeannie Oakes and John Rogers, *Learning Power: Organizing for Education and Justice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 39.

[188] Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). Berlin recalls the work of Giambattista Vico in constructing a

Within a pluralistic understanding of society, no one social arrangement is privileged.

Instead, each community or culture defines itself based on the abilities and beliefs of its

members. As Isaiah Berlin argues, "there are many different ends that men may seek and

still be fully rational, fully men, capable of understanding each other and sympathizing

and deriving light from each other…."[189] In this sense, diverse groups of individuals

come together to find a common understanding by which each person can maintain his or

her individuality while also contributing to the overall welfare of the community.

In summary, in a Deweyan sense, community is defined as a group of individuals

actively engaged with each other and working cooperatively to reach common goals in

the interest of the group. Individual rights are not subjugated to the interest of the

community, but private interests are limited in scope in relation to the overall satisfactory

functioning of community life.[190] Further, in *Ethics*, Dewey writes

> The positive import of "common good" is suggested by the idea
> of sharing, participating-an idea involved in the very idea of
> *community*. Sharing a good or value in a way which makes it
> social in quality is not identical with dividing up a material thing
> into physical parts. To partake is to *take* part, to *play* a role. It is
> something active, something which engages the desires and aims

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pluralistic view of modern society that is grounded in the accepting of difference and the rejection of the notion of any ideal society. Berlin follows Vico in arguing against a perfect or Utopian society. Berlin credits Vico as being the father of our modern conception of cultural pluralism. Dewey's belief in diverse communities where disparate individuals come together to live, work, and share experiences together is consistent with Vico's ideas. Further, Berlin contends, in a manner similar to Dewey, that ongoing communication and interaction between individuals is the only way to develop healthy and diverse communities.

[189] Ibid., 11.

[190] Larry Hickman, *Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture: Putting Pragmatism to Work* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).

of each contributing member.[191]

Dewey held that each member of society should use his or her experiences and knowledge to contribute actively to the maintenance of the community. Following Dewey, there are no individuals without associated contexts, without interaction in social contexts.[192] Said differently, there is no individual that exists in a natural state outside of a social arrangement where interactions and ongoing experiences define one's very being.

Throughout his writings, Dewey held that individuals are bound to interconnectedness and associations by default as our very survival requires that we interact with others from the moment we are born. Dewey argues in *Experience and Nature* that, "Everything that exists in as far as it is known and knowable is in interaction with other things. It is associated, as well as solitary, single."[193] There is no individual living a completely isolated existence, the situation simply does not exist. Furthermore, as Dewey argues, people are prone to associate. He asserts

> More particularly, the American people have shown that they are
> particularly apt at entering into association; they are given to associating
> and joining social groups…But we find this ability is arrested and
> deflected into wrong channels by an economy in which a system of
> mass production and distribution is subordinated to gaining pecuniary profit.[194]

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[191] John Dewey, *Ethics*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey, v.7: 1932*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1991), 345.

[192] Hickman, *John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology*, 169.

[193] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1925/1958), 175.

[194] John Dewey and John L. Childs, "Underlying Philosophy of Education," *The Educational Frontier* (1933): 287-319. In *The Later Works of John Dewey, Vol. 8: 1933*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1989), 85.

While Dewey holds that association is natural, he also concedes that the capitalist system, laden with mass produced goods and the manipulation of human desire, interrupts the formation and maintenance of social arrangements.

Dewey also eschews the dualism of social and individual; rather, he holds that society *is* individuals in association with one another. As Dewey argues, "Society is individuals-in-their-relations. An individual apart from social relations is a myth-or a monstrosity."[195] It is within social arrangements that the individual refines his or her personality and strengths while also accepting a role within the group. It is here that the individual learns the norms and values that define the culture in which he or she lives. These norms and values influence each individual's response to experiences with others and the environment.[196] Said differently, human beings act and react in accordance to the cultural norms of the society they inhabit. Dewey asserts that behavior is not a purely physical act, but rather, an intricate balance of physical and cultural performance.[197]

In looking at communication and culture, Dewey argues that language defines culture; it is the tool that separates human activity from the purely physical response of animals.[198] Language brings about communication which gives rise to cooperation and community. For Dewey, we develop human intellect to be able to interact within our

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[195] Ibid., 80

[196] Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 48-49. Dewey argues that the environment in which human beings live is not simply physical, it is also cultural. Reactions to problems encountered are influenced by our relations to others, and the norms and beliefs of the culture in which we live.

[197] Ibid., 49.

[198] Ibid., 62-63.

cultural spaces and to coordinate our behaviors with others in our social setting.[199] We

come to understand our experiences through cultural narratives based on accepted norms.

The degree to which these norms are realized is contingent upon our communication with

one another. Often, that communication is scripted for us through culture, a point to be

discussed in greater length later in this paper.

Dewey believed that communication was an integral component of interaction and

experience among individuals. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey argues, "When

communication occurs, all natural events are subject to reconsideration and revision; they

are re-adapted to meet the requirements of conversation, whether it be public discourse or

that preliminary discourse termed thinking."[200] Dewey regarded communication as a

paramount human activity upon which new associations are formed and social life is

rendered more beneficial for all involved.[201] He believed that dialogue between disparate

groups was essential for the growth of society, for when a single value or standpoint is

privileged above all others; monism and dogmatism are the result.[202] It was through

interaction and ongoing communication that human society would best meet the needs of

all of its members.

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[199] Jim Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 140. Garrison holds with Dewey in arguing that conduct is shared by the members of any culture or community. Human behavior does not occur in a vacuum, it is highly influenced action that takes direction from the society in which it occurs.

[200] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 166.

[201] Larry Hickman, *Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture: Putting Pragmatism to Work.*

[202] Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching*, 15.

It was essential for Dewey that communication between individuals occurs freely without direction or restriction from external forces. Recall from earlier in this paper the discussion of Deweyan notions of community as spaces where individuals are free to interact with one another without reproach. Dewey's notion of communication is steeped in the same belief in the free exchange of ideas. To this end, Dewey was also keenly aware that communication between members of any community could be both augmented and stifled by myriad forces working outside of the immediate community. Throughout the early twentieth century, Dewey saw mass communication technologies as having the ability to stifle the free exchange of ideas if those technologies were corrupted.

John Dewey and Technology

Before applying a Deweyan lens to a critique of television, I explore Dewey's ideas regarding technology as television is one of the most important communication technologies of our time. As Jim Garrison asserts, Dewey's notion of technology owes much to what the Greeks called *techne*, a word used by Plato and Aristotle to describe any productive skill.[203] For the Greeks, t*echne* differed from *physis* (instinctive ability), and *tyche* (mere chance), in that *techne* was seen as a middle ground between the two. For Aristotle and Plato, *techne* described the skills, arts, and tools that individuals employed to imitate nature in bringing change upon the world.

Dewey's notion of technology is similar to Plato's; yet Dewey sees technology as those skills, tools, and *experience*s that assist individuals in active inquiry, testing and

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[203] Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching*, 10

retesting truth claims so as make sense of the world.[204] It is from this vantage point that Dewey approaches philosophy, as a technology that human beings could and should use to further improve the human experience. In other words, Dewey sees philosophy as an active practice, not a dogmatic theoretical means by which to understand the world. As Jim Garrison argues, Dewey eschewed the "philosophy-versus-practice distinction," choosing instead to argue for philosophy as practical reasoning amidst the natural world.[205] Dewey rejected the theory-versus-practice dualism, and it is from here that he refined his notion of philosophy as technology; a framework that permeates his life's work.

Dewey does not see technology as a singular term with a finite definition. He chooses, instead, to hold that technology is ever-changing, existing in active inquiry, where inquiry leads to the alleviation of some problem.[206] In a Deweyan sense, inquiry *is* technology as any inquiring being must take action to solve a problem or obstacle. This process requires the shaping and controlling of those tools that solve problems. Whether those tools are physical items or abstract thoughts, if they are instrumental in solving problems, they are forms of technology for Dewey.[207] Dewey sees technology as he does

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[204] Hickman, *John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology*, 2-3.

[205] Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching*, 13. Garrison argues that Dewey shunned the dualism of theory and practice as it posits distinctions in everyday life. These distinctions are realized in social arrangements that privilege one group above another (i.e. experts versus layman). Dewey eschewed these distinctions in favor of holistic experiences that rendered real life experiences more equitable.

[206] Hickman, *John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology,* 45.

[207] Hickman, *Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture*, 26-27.

philosophy, as an active process that allows human beings to solve problems actively, through ongoing inquiry into problematic situations.

In *Logic*, Dewey argues that inquiry is the "controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole."[208] Recall that for Dewey, inquiry involves an individual taking action to solve problems encountered so as to move life forward. As Garrison argues, the purpose of Dewey's inquiry is to "help us cope with the stress of living and to aid us in our lives wherever possible."[209] In a world of constant flux, Dewey saw inquiry as providing the means by which individuals can navigate the changing world and continue to build upon lived experiences.

Having lived through a time of rapid technological advances and enhanced communicative interaction, Dewey was well aware not only of the positive benefits of communication technologies, the fact that information could be shared among large groups of people much faster than ever before, but Dewey was also aware of the challenges wrought by such technologies. Said differently, a communication medium that might be used to bring people together via the rapid distribution of information can also foster isolation and disinterest in public life. As Larry Hickman argues, the cohesive, tradition-based communities that Dewey held up as worth seeking might also be torn

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[208] John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey, v.12: 1938*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1991), 108.

[209] Garrison, *Dewey and Eros*, 93.

apart by "highways, a bridge, telephones, television sets...."[210] To Hickman, technological advances, especially advanced communication technologies, may function to erode the direct communicative action that Dewey embraced as essential to the maintenance of active, democratic communities.

Television and Experience

Recall Dewey's notion of experience as an active, ongoing process. Following this conception, Dewey also asserts that *educativ*e experiences are active, social processes which occur when an individual's interactions with an environment lead to perpetual growth.[211] As Garrison argues, for Dewey, educational experiences "exemplify continuity and growth."[212] In other words Deweyan notions of growth require ongoing experiences in which human beings move through periods of equilibrium and crisis. This point is furthered by Fishman and McCarthy, who assert that educative experiences require continuity, and occur when "a sequence of experiences, despite occasional cul de sacs and detours, is so driven be deeply held purposes that it coheres, develops, and finds fulfillment...."[213] The key here for Dewey is that ongoing experiences are educative, marked by continuity, and lead to the growth of the individual and the community.

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[210] Hickman, *John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology*, 176.

[211] Dewey, *Experience and Education,* 34-35.

[212] Jim Garrison, "John Dewey's Philosophy as Education," in *Reading Dewey: Interpretations for a Postmodern Generation*, edited by Larry Hickman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 66.

[213] Fishman and McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Challenge of Classroom Practice,* 32.

While Dewey's conception of educative experiences seems to allow any interaction to be considered educative, Dewey refined his position in *Experience and Education*:

> That a man may grow in efficiency as a burglar, as a gangster, or as a corrupt politician, cannot be doubted. But from the standpoint of growth as education and education as growth the question is whether growth in this direction promotes or retards growth in general. Does this form of growth create conditions for further growth, or does it set up conditions that shut off the person who has grown in this particular direction from the occasions, stimuli, and opportunities for continuing growth in new directions?[214]

Experiences are educative when they are connected with past and current interactions and lead to further opportunities for growth without limits. For Dewey, unlimited growth requires plasticity, where plasticity is understood as an individual's being open to new situations, and willing to interact freely with others in order to grow.[215] Conversely, Dewey defines miseducative experiences as those experiences that retard one's opportunity for continual growth.[216] An experience may be pleasurable and provide immediate contentment, but if such an experience leads to complacency or apathy, then further growth is, de facto, stunted.

For Dewey, what is traditionally considered "education" is miseducative if it restricts one's growth by promoting finality or pre-determined ends. Further, educative experiences are not administered to or for individuals; educative experiences are generated from within and move outward into new territory. I argue that in its current form, television is miseducative as it creates little opportunity for individuals to have

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[214] Ibid., 36.

[215] Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 101.

[216] Ibid., 36.

educative experiences as television in its current form is externally directed and does not promote growth through interaction. As Alex Molnar argues, television and mass media are built on what Dewey termed miseducative experiences.[217] Further, there is no human interaction when an individual watches television alone.

The same argument could be made in regard to reading. Reading is an activity that individuals usually engage in alone, without external distraction. However, unlike reading, there is less active mental processing involved in television watching, television watching is a mostly passive act.[218] Unlike reading, which involves textual analysis that is rooted in past experience and is informed by changing environmental conditions, television allows the viewer to submit to its visual stimulation without any prior experience with the material presented.[219] Reading a novel involves continuity, there is a marked beginning and end, there is a notion that experiences occur in a structured manner that bring overall meaning to the text.

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[217] Alex Molnar, *School Commercialism: From Democratic Ideal to Market Commodity* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 80-81. Molnar argues that television and other mass media turn Dewey's philosophy "inside out" in urging individuals to give in to impulses in hopes that they will make irrational decisions about what to watch and what to buy. As Molnar asserts, the last thing television network executives and advertisers want is for viewers to have self-control.

[218] See, for example, Shin, "Exploring Pathways from Television Viewing to Academic Achievement in School Age Children." Shin's argument regarding television-induced passivity is not a new one. See also, Ronald Kubey and Mihalyi Czikzentmilhalyi, *Television and the Quality of Life*; Jerome L. Singer, "The Power and Limits of Television: A Cognitive-Affective Analysis;" and Spigel, *Make Room for TV.*

[219] Neil Postman and Steve Powers, *How to Watch TV News* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

Recall that for Dewey, educative experiences require continuity. I argue that television, by its nature, is discontinuous in that it presents texts that are fragmented, and occur without relation to past experience. I hold with television critic John Fiske who asserts in *Television Culture*:

> The television text, then, is composed of a rapid succession of
> compressed, vivid segments where the principle of logic and cause
> and effect is subordinated to that of association and consequence to
> sequence. The movement of television is discontinuous, interrupted,
> and segmented. Its attempts at closure, at a unitary meaning, or a
> unified viewing subject, are constantly subjected to fracturing forces.[220]

Because television occurs in an interrupted form, it stands in opposition to the Deweyan idea of continuity of experiences. Following this notion, Neil Postman and Steve Powers assert that television news is, *de facto*, primarily a spectator event. He argues:

> The fact that television news is principally made up of moving
> pictures prevents it from offering lengthy, coherent explanations of
> events. A television news show reveals the world as a series of unrelated,
> fragmentary moments. It does not-and cannot be expected to-offer a sense
> of coherence or meaning. What does this suggest to the TV viewer? Here a
> falling building, there a five-alarm fire, everywhere the world as an object
> much without meaning connections, or continuity.[221]

Television news, like much of television's content, privileges images presented in a fragmented state, often without any notion of preceding events, or how the present events shape present or future activity.

While the above argument details the way in which television watching is miseducative in a Deweyan sense, I now consider the miseducative nature of much of the content presented on television. Neil Postman has offered that television reduces all information to visual entertainment and that there is little opportunity for political or

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[220] Fiske, *Television Culture: Popular Pleasures and Politics*, 104.

[221] Postman and Powers, *How to Watch TV News,* 113-114.

cultural discourse on television as it promotes images over ideas.[222] In this model, truth through discourse is subverted by the need to convey specific visual messages to the viewing public. Postman assets that television laid the groundwork for the rise of the visual culture that changed the American landscape during the twentieth century.

The movement towards a television-driven culture of imagery is explored in greater detail in the book *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, by Daniel Boorstin. Boorstin asserts that television rose to prominence in modern culture by presenting novelty as more interesting than what Boorstin calls "pale reality."[223] Through the presentation of scripted, pseudo-events, television offers an ongoing stream of fabricated experiences that focus on visual spectacle.[224] In Boorstin's words:

> Pseudo-events are more dramatic. A television debate between candidates can be planned to be more suspenseful than a casual encounter or consecutive formal speeches planned by each separately. Pseudo-events, being planned for dissemination, are easier to disseminate and to make vivid. Pseudo-events cost money to create; hence somebody has an interest in disseminating, magnifying, advertising, and extolling them as events worth watching or worth believing.[225]

Boorstin argues that an image-driven culture like ours deprives information of its meaning as it becomes a simple commodity that is passed about without appreciation of its influence on real life situations.

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[222] Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death,* 45.

[223] Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage, 1961/1992), 40. Boorstin traces the rise of our image-driven culture throughout the twentieth century, from the creation of formal public relations activities in the 1930s, to the rise of television and around-the-clock visual advertising later in the twentieth century.

[224] Ibid.

[225] Ibid., 39-40.

John Fiske expands on television's role in furthering the triumph of the image in the twentieth century. In *Television Culture*, Fiske asserts:

> Images are clearer, more impressive than the reality they claim to represent, but they are also fragmented, contradictory and exhibit a vast variety that questions the unity of the world of experience. Images are made and read in relation to other images and the real is read as an image. TV news is a mosaic of images of elite persons, horrific nature, and human violence. TV sport is a kaleidoscope of images of muscle, of skill, of pain. The images are what matter, they exist in their own flickering domain and never come to rest in a firm anchorage in the real.[226]

Holding with Boorstin, Fiske argues that television is, in a sense, its own disconnected universe into which individuals venture, leaving real life issues behind. Fiske argues, that television offers an image-driven misrepresentation of reality that distracts the population away from solving problems and growing intellectually. I argue, following Postman, Boorstin, and Fiske, that what has been forged via television is a space wholly designed for the privileging of images and the suppression of ideas. To this end, recalling Dewey's notion of educative experiences, television viewing is miseducative in that the privileging of imagery over factual information can be understood as limiting growth in a Deweyan sense.

Prior to the invention of television, Dewey warned that information that is mass distributed to the general public is usually done so in a disconnected manner rendering the information useless except in its ability to excite the emotions.[227] Dewey saw the press as peddling amusement and pabulum and that did little to help the public make

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[226] Fiske, *Television Culture: Popular Pleasures and Politics*, 107.

[227] Dewey, *Freedom and Culture,* 35-36.

sense of the world.[228] More recently, John Ellis argues, television presents the events of the world to an audience that is safe at home, relaxing and seeking entertainment and distraction.[229] The viewer receives television's imagery and sound, but cannot meaningfully act to change that which is presented. Receiving emotive information may cause an initial reaction in the person receiving the information, but the experience is miseducative if it retards growth by limiting our interactions with each other and the natural environment.

Television and Knowledge

In *The Quest for Certainty,* Dewey argues against the human desire to find a perfected knowledge existing in eternal truths. Dewey believes that this desire for perfection leads to our ongoing search for certainty in a changing world that is marked by happenstance.[230] Dewey argues that knowledge grows not from belief in fixed truths, but rather from ongoing interactions between individuals and an ever-evolving world. Dewey asserts that "We *believe* in the absence of knowledge or complete assurance. Hence the quest for certainty has always been an effort to transcend belief."[231] For Dewey, our desire for knowledge, where knowledge is the assurance that some "thing" is true, stems from our longing to find certainty in an existence that is replete with change and disequilibrium. The quest for certainty leads us to conceive of knowledge as a static

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[228] Ibid.

[229] Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 163.

[230] John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Capricorn, 1929/1960), 26.

[231] Ibid. Italics in original.

endpoint that exists apart from active knowing grounded in ongoing inquiry and experience. In this dissertation, I argue that television, in a Deweyan sense, is a purveyor of a static form of knowledge that satisfies our ongoing quest for certitude while deadening our desire to be active knowers engaged in ongoing inquiry.

Dewey wrestled with the connotations of the terms knowledge and knowing throughout his life. As Larry Hickman argues, Dewey came to embrace the far less permanent notion of active knowing via warranted assertibility,[232] a term I explore further later in this chapter. It is in *Quest for Certainty* that Dewey extends his distinction between the static concept *knowledge*, and the active concept of *knowing*. Dewey argues that a "spectator theory of knowledge" is the inevitable outcome when active knowing is subjugated in favor of the acquisition of static knowledge.[233] Dewey wrote that the spectator theory was deeply flawed in arguing that knowing is not just the capturing of an instance, but an active process involving experimentation and change.[234] Said differently, knowledge is not doled out to those who sit passively awaiting an allocation, knowledge is gained through active engagement with others and the world.

For Dewey, *knowledge* is produced actively, by individuals who remain engaged in a process of inquiry that is reflective of lived experience and perpetuates ongoing refinement of knowledge claims. Hickman offers a lucid summation of Dewey's notion of knowledge as an active process in asserting that "Successful living requires an active

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[232] Larry Hickman, "Dewey's Theory of Inquiry," in *Reading Dewey: Interpretations for a Postmodern Generation*, ed. Larry Hickman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 167.

[233] Ibid., 196.

[234] Larry Hickman, *Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture*, 27.

and ongoing reconstruction of experienced situations. Dewey's notion of warranted

assertibility…is not a matter of a spectator getting a better view of a fixed state of affairs

that is already 'out there.'"[235] In Dewey's model, living requires interaction, it requires

that individuals take action, not remain passive spectators to happenstance. Unlike

television watching, living requires that individuals engage in real interactions with each

other and the environment.

Throughout his writings on knowledge, Dewey argues against a separation

between knowers and that which is to be known. In Deweyan epistemology, knowers and

that which is to be known are not mutually exclusive ideas. Dewey posits that:

> All of these notions about certainty and the fixed, about the nature
> of the real world, about the nature of the mind and its organs of
> knowing are completely bound up with one another…They all flow-
> such is my basic thesis-from the separation (set up in the interest
> of the quest for absolute certainty) between theory and practice,
> knowledge and action.[236]

Dewey does not separate the actor from the action or the known from the knower. Dewey

argues against human beings as existing apart from the externally mediated truths that are

to be known. Instead, Dewey believed that knowledge was born of action taken in real

time as obstacles were encountered. As Jim Garrison argues:

> Dewey's rejection of the theory-versus-practice distinction becomes
> significant here. For Dewey all reasoning is practical means-end
> reasoning conducted for some purpose or value. For him everything

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[235] Hickman, "Dewey's Theory of Inquiry," in *Reading Dewey: Interpretations for a Postmodern Generation*, 195. For further discussion of Dewey's notion of warranted assertibility see Deron Boyles, "Dewey's Epistemology: An Argument for Warranted Assertions, Knowing, and Meaningful Classroom Practice," *Educational Theory* 56, no. 1 (February 2006): 57-68.

[236] Ibid., 23-24.

that existed is a natural event like life in which everything is vague, indeterminate, and subject to change.[237]

Again, for Dewey, knowing requires action that moves toward some practical aim or purpose for the knower. Said differently, knowing is not accepting an external and eternal truth as a culminating activity after some deliberation. Knowing is, instead, an active process steeped in ongoing experience. In this dissertation, I argue, following Dewey, that knowing requires more than the intellectual and literal passivity engendered by television watching. I argue that this renders television as antithetical to Dewey's notion of active knowers.

It is later in *The Quest for Certainty* that Dewey further explains his distinction between active knowers and passive spectators. Dewey states, "If we see that knowing is not the act of an outside spectator but of a participator inside the natural and social scene, then the true object of knowledge resides in the consequences of direct action."[238] Recall that for Dewey, knowing involves participation; it is an active process that requires individuals be engaged in interactions that lead to growth and change. Knowing is not done to or for someone, knowing occurs through our ongoing interactions with other beings and the natural world. Moreover, knowing does not occur passively; it is an active process that involves interconnectedness and leads to ongoing growth and change. In a Deweyan sense, spectators are not active knowers, they can only be passive receivers of another's claims to knowledge and truth.

Dewey reiterates his distinction between (active) knowing and (passive) knowledge later in *The Quest for Certainty* when he argues for action as a natural

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[237] Garrison, *Wisdom and Eros*, 13.

[238] Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, 213.

consequence of interacting with a changing world. Dewey states:

> …the knowing which occurs within nature involves possibility
> of direction of change…That which acts outside of nature and
> is a mere spectator of it is, by definition, not a participator in its
> changes. Action may follow but it is only an external attachment
> to knowing, not an inherent factor in it. As a mechanical
> addendum, it is inferior to knowledge.[239]

Moreover, knowers are active participants in the process of coming to know some thing

through active inquiry. Knowledge that is received from external sources, outside of the

direct action of the knower, does not involve active knowing. Further, for Dewey this

externally-mediated knowledge does not contribute to intelligence or growth. Dewey

states that this mediated knowledge "…adds nothing to intelligence or knowledge. It can

only increase personal shrewdness in prudential manipulation of conditions."[240] Instead of

developing intellect and rational thought, mediated knowledge creates a separation

between the knower and that which is to be known. Further, mediated knowledge closes

off inquiry.

In Dewey's *Logic,* he furthers the idea of knowledge as a static concept arguing in

favor of "warranted assertions" as opposed to the abstract term knowledge.[241] Recall

Dewey favoring the notion of warranted assertibility over the more static term

knowledge. In *Logic*, Dewey posits that warranted assertions are open-ended knowledge

claims that are fallible and susceptible to ongoing refinement. Consider Dewey's

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[239] Ibid., 206.

[240] Ibid.

[241] Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, *v.12: 1938*, 15.

argument in *Logic*:

> Knowledge, as an abstract term, is a name for the product of
> competent inquiries. The general conception of knowledge, when
> formulated in terms of the outcome of inquiry, has something
> important to say regarding the meaning of inquiry itself. For it
> indicates that the inquiry is a *continuing* process in every field
> with which is it engaged.[242]

For Dewey, the static term knowledge signifies the end of inquiry. Knowledge, as a

concept, exists only theoretically as it is not connected to any formal assertion of

something that is actively knowable. Dewey argues for knowledge claims to be

understood as warranted assertions that stem from ongoing inquiry. Warranted assertion

allows for "potentiality rather than an actuality"[243] and the possibility that those

assertions will grow or change over time. In a Deweyan sense, warranted assertion

requires flexibility, plasticity, and an embrace of uncertainty. Warranted assertibility

rejects fixed states and notions of truth that remain untested and unchallenged.

Following the claims asserted in *Logic* and *The Quest for Certainty*, in

Democracy and Education Dewey argues for an active knowing grounded in experience

and inquiry. Here, Dewey asserts that knowing involves living actors engaging with each

other and the natural world. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey's focus is on the

student, and the responsibility schools have in developing active, inquiring minds. Here

Dewey argues:

> If the living, experiencing being is an intimate participant in the
> activities of the world to which it belongs, then knowledge is a mode
> of participation, valuable in the degree to which it is effective. It cannot

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[242] Ibid., 16.

[243] Ibid., 16.

be the idle view of an unconcerned spectator.[244]

Again, Dewey draws a distinction between the active, inquiring being in the process of creating and reshaping knowledge claims within a given context. To Dewey, only the active participant can offer claims based on lived experiences and obstacles confronted.

In addition to his posing static knowledge against active knowing, Dewey also argues against notions of infallibility in *The Quest for Certainty*. It is in *Quest* that Dewey argues that no knowledge is "self-guaranteed to be infallible" as all knowledge is malleable and stems from ongoing acts of (active) inquiry.[245] To Dewey, knowledge is always subject to reevaluation and reshaping based on emergent information garnered from ongoing acts of inquiry. In a Deweyan sense, viewers must accept television as an infallible knowledge source as there is no way to meaningfully debate with the television. Television presents an ongoing stream of information that does not invite inquiry, and the claims presented exist apart from the lived experiences of the viewer.

The separation that exists between the television viewer and the activity being televised is similar to Dewey's notion of a "spectator theory of knowledge," where the knower claims to know that something is the case based on correspondence to another's knowledge claim. The fact in question is understood externally, setting up the problem of the "view from nowhere," which suggests that any holder of knowledge must be decontextualized—something Dewey eschews. Internally mediated knowledge is closer to Dewey's ultimate goal of warranted assertibility and it requires context, association, and interconnection. I argue that watching television does not promote association or

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[244] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 242.

[245] Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, 193.

interconnectedness in a Deweyan sense, it serves to create a separation between human beings and reality. As Albert Borgmann argues, "The breathless glamour of television numbs their [the public's] ability to confront and endure the gravity and pressure of reality."[246] Television creates barriers between the individual viewer and the action being televised, as well as barriers between the individual viewer and his or her community.

Having considered Dewey's distinctions between active knowing and the static term knowledge, I now look more closely at how his ideas can inform a current critique of television. It is my contention that television viewing represents an example of Dewey's idea of a disconnected spectator. I argue that television's ongoing stream of knowledge claims seems to undermine the viewers potential to be a free, inquiring actor in search for knowledge through action. Television, as a unidirectional source of ongoing images, exists outside the realm of active inquiry and debate in real time. A viewer cannot conduct inquiry into the content of television's programming until after the programming has become a relic of the past.

Recall from earlier in this chapter Dewey's spectator theory of knowledge. I argue that there is great potential for an individual to become Dewey's spectator during the passive act of television watching. Recall also the argument of the Frankfurt School scholars who held that television, as a chief component of the culture industry, put forth only spectacle for distraction. The notion of television viewer as spectator is furthered more recently by Budd, et al., who assert that "Instead of watching the Discovery Channel, we could actually be discovering for ourselves."[247] In a Deweyan sense,

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[246] Albert Borgmann, *Holding on to Reality: The Nature of Information at the Turn of the Millennium* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 6.

television creates barriers between the viewer (the knower) and the natural world (that

which is to be known). Television "distances us from our existence as active, conscious

agents in the environment."[248]

Television scholar John Ellis furthers the notion of Dewey's disconnected

and decontextualized spectator in asserting:

> The isolation of the viewer implies a lack of involvement with
> the events being portrayed. This lack of involvement is intensified
> by the voyeuristic activity of TV itself, and its recruitment of the
> viewer to a complicity with it. TV's separation from the events at
> which it looks becomes the viewer's isolation or insulation from them.[249]

In Ellis's model, the viewer can watch a world that exists beyond both the immediate

environment of the viewer, but also beyond the viewer's ability to have an influence upon

that which is viewed. In this sense, the television citizen can remain comfortable with life

in their own living room without actually participating in the real life activity presented

on television. Ellis continues

> Citizenship therefore constitutes the television viewer as someone
> powerless to do anything about the events portrayed other than sympathize
> or become angry. The whole domestic arrangement of broadcast TV and
> the aesthetic forms it has evolved to come to terms with this domestic
> arrangement provide broadcast TV with the ability to this and no more.
> The citizenship it provides as the position for its viewers is a position of
> impotence.[250]

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[247] Budd, et al., *Consuming Environments*, 82.

[248] Ibid., 21.

[249] John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 166. Ellis argues that television viewing equates citizenship with viewership where the viewer defines himself or herself by how much of the outside world they see on TV, not through engagement in real world issues. Individuals can watch the tragedy and spectacle of the world, or their local community, from the comfort of home without actually getting involved.

[250] Ibid., 170.

Following Ellis' argument, in a Deweyan sense, television reduces democratic citizenship to pure spectator activity where the public can only watch, but not engage or debate. As Dewey held that all knowledge stemmed from experiences grounded in active ongoing inquiry, I argue that Ellis's idea of voyeuristic citizenship engendered by television is diametrically opposed to Dewey's notions of active knowers. In other words, television viewing limits one's ability to engage in active inquiry, associated living, and ongoing experiences that lead to the development of knowledge, where knowledge is understood as an active process.

In the 1980s, Neil Postman argued that television had become modern society's "chief means for knowing about itself,"[251] as it was becoming clear at that time that television was the most popular means by which the public received information about the world. Television's position as the public's chief communicator led Postman to also argue that television is an epistemic device as notions of truth are "often derived from those media through which information is communicated."[252] In this sense, television, as a primary source of information for many individuals, can be understood as an epistemic agent that shapes society's understanding of knowledge and truth. Television has assumed the role of chief distributor of information to the general public; it is the means by which many individuals come to know the world around them.

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[251] Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 92.

[252] Ibid.

If television provides modern society with its primary means of knowing about itself, then one must consider how the claims presented by television influence our relationship with knowledge and truth. Dewey's notion of thinking in relation to accepted notions of knowledge and truth can inform our understanding here. In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey argues

> What is taken for knowledge—for fact and truth—at a given time may not be such. But everything which is assumed without question, which is taken for granted in our intercourse with one another and nature is what, at the given time, is *called* knowledge. Thinking on the contrary, starts, as we have seen, from doubt or uncertainty. It marks an inquiring, hunting, searching attitude, instead of one of mastery and possession.[253]

For Dewey, individuals develop intelligence through active questioning and embracing of uncertainty in one's interactions with the natural world. Recall Dewey's active knower who searches not for knowledge in certitude and fixed truth claims, but in ongoing interactions. I argue that television is a transmitter of fixed truths that stand opposed to Dewey's ideas regarding knowledge acquisition.

Similar to his argument in *The Quest for Certainty*, in *How We Think* Dewey states that thinking is an active process, beginning with doubt and uncertainty, and involving ongoing reflection and "suspended conclusions."[254] One must be willing to face the risks of uncertainty if one is to truly think and grow. Further, Dewey argues that "A disciplined mind takes delight in the problematic…The questionable becomes an active

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[253] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 52. Italics in original.

[254] John Dewey, *How We Think.* In *The Later Works of John Dewey, vol. 8: 1933*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1989), 123-124.

questioning, a search…"[255] Again, I argue that television promotes certainty and

suppresses problematic situations to be actively solved. I argue that television provides

externally mediated knowledge in the form of conclusions and certainties that serve to

pacify individuals and limit opportunities for growth. Moreover, television renders

individuals into passive spectators disconnected from the programming presented.

Recall current research cited in chapter three that has shown that television does

indeed promote passivity while limiting the interactions between individuals and the

environment.[256] In this dissertation I argue that Dewey's active knowing cannot occur

when a viewer sits passively receiving static bits of knowledge that television doles out.

Further, when an individual watches television alone there is little opportunity for growth

through social interaction. Again, in a Deweyan sense, television "teaches" people to be

passive receivers of information with which they have no *real* experience. Television

leads viewers to become Dewey's spectator, detached from ongoing interactions and

active inquiry.

Later in his life, Dewey wrote of communication media's ability to shape and

refine the public's understanding of knowledge claims and popular notions of truth.[257]

Dewey warned that the mass distribution of information to the general public is done so

in a disconnected manner, rendering the information useless except in its ability to excite

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[255] Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, 228.

[256] See, for example, Shin, "Exploring Pathways from Television Viewing to Academic Achievement in School Age Children;" and Vandewater, et al., "Time Well Spent? Relating Television Use to Children's Free-Time Activities."

[257] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems.* In *The Later Works of John Dewey, Vol.2: 1925-1927*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press), 1988, 347-348.

the emotions.[258] Emotions often lead one to act, but only when and where action is

possible. Dewey asserts:

> A glance at the situation shows that the physical and external means of collecting information in regard to what is happening in the world have far outrun the intellectual phase of inquiry and organization of its results. Telegraph, telephone, cheap and quick mails, the printing press, capable of swift reduplication of material at low cost, have attained a remarkable development. "News" signifies something which has just happened, and which is new just because it deviates from the old and regular. But its meaning depends upon relation to what it imports, to what its social consequences are. This import cannot be determined unless the new is placed in relation to the old, to what has happened and been integrated into the course of events.[259]

Dewey's notion here of disconnected information that is reported simply for its

sensationalism conjures up thoughts of local television newscasts that highlight the most

gratuitous events for the sake of stimulating shock, fear, and high ratings. The news is

little more than the latest episode of note, its pertinence to the viewer is not as important

as the distraction it creates. There is little most viewers can do about the information

presented in news programming, unless he or she is intimately involved in the events

presented. Often, however, this is not the case as viewers are often rendered

inconsequential consumer of spectacle.

Dewey again warns about the distraction provided by mass communication

technologies in *Freedom and Culture.* Here, Dewey asserts that a free press is essential

for the distribution of information in a free society, but that information can also be

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[258] Ibid.

[259] Ibid., 347.

manipulated by those who have the ability to control and manipulate the press. Dewey writes:

> …while free institutions over a wider territory are not possible without a mechanism like the press, for quick and extensive communication of ideas and information, and without general literacy to take advantage of the mechanism, yet these very factors create a problem for democracy instead of providing a final solution. Aside from the fact that the press may distract with trivialities or be an agent of a faction, or be an instrument of inculcating ideas in support of a hidden interest or group (all in the name of public interest), the wide-world present scene is such that individuals are overwhelmed and emotionally confused by publicized reverberation of isolated events.[260]

To Dewey, the fact that the printing press and radio were spreading information faster than ever before was not as important as what the public *did* with that information. Today, television can spread information faster, and with a deeper sensory experience than the printing press and radio ever did, yet, is the information presented disconnected from the lived experiences of those receiving the information? Would Dewey be as critical of television's influence as he was with the mass media technologies of his day? I believe he would.

In a Deweyan sense, knowledge is produced actively by individuals engaged in ongoing interaction with their surroundings. Further, knowledge is born of exploration marked by risk and happenstance; knowledge does not reside in traditions handed down throughout generations, or unchallenged rituals accepted as truth across time. Recall from earlier in this chapter Dewey's notion that knowledge stems from the inquiry of all people, not just philosophers and scientists. We all must get dirty in the mess that is everyday life, using each encounter and each experience, to build new connections that

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[260] John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, 38.

lead to active knowing. It is through these activities that individuals continue to create and refine knowledge claims on an ongoing basis.

In this dissertation I argue that television is a device that stands in opposition to Dewey's theory of active knowing. Television, in its current form and format, exists as a purveyor of static, externally mediated knowledge claims that does not involve viewers in active knowledge production. For Dewey, individuals develop intelligence through active questioning and embracing of uncertainty in one's interactions with the natural world. I argue that television exists as a source of certainty that purports to remove uncertainty and doubt. In other words, television does not create questions and open doors; rather, it provides people with answers while discouraging social interaction and inquiry. I believe television viewing stands in opposition to the development of what Dewey would consider a knowledgeable and thoughtful individual based on his writings on the subject. Further, television distracts individuals from becoming active knowers who are actively engaged in inquiry and searching for new connections and interactions.

Television, Democracy, and Public Opinion

John Dewey wrote extensively about democracy and his belief in democratic community throughout his life. Dewey saw democracy as he did all human experiences, as an endeavor that required ongoing interaction and communication. Democracy, for Dewey, is a way of life, it is "action informed by faith in the possibilities of human nature and human life."[261] Dewey also understood that democracy requires an informed public whose opinions and beliefs were shaped not by agents of mass media, but through

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[261] John T. Stuhr, "Dewey's Social and Political Philosophy," in *Reading Dewey: Interpretations for a Postmodern Generation*, ed. Larry Hickman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 87.

experience and interaction. Dewey's definitions of democracy, as well as his writings on the framing of public opinion presented in *Democracy and Education, The Public and Its Problems, and Freedom and Culture,* guide this section of the dissertation.

In *Democracy and Education* Dewey writes that democracy is "more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience."[262] For Dewey, democracy is not a vague platitude existing outside of one's lived experiences; rather, it is an ongoing interactive process that human beings engage in together. Recall that Dewey's philosophy is grounded in the idea of the active individual, a social being that interacts and associates with other beings, and the natural world.[263] In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey writes, "Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself."[264] In a Deweyan sense, democracy requires that diverse groups of individuals engage in intercourse so as to solve those problems that keep humankind from progressing. In this dissertation, I hold, in accord with Dewey, that democracy requires individuals be free to interact with one another through ongoing communication, interaction, and the exchange of ideas.

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[262] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 87.

[263] John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, *v.12: 1938*, 40. Dewey borrows from Aristotle's idea of man as a social animal in arguing that human beings are innately inquisitive beings involved in ongoing interactions and associations with each other and the world.

[264] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*. In *The Later Works of John Dewey, Vol.2: 1925-1927*, 328.

In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey furthers his idea of democracy as conjoint

associated experience in arguing for the recreation of local communal living, which

Dewey sees as the cornerstone of democratic community.[265] Dewey argues

> wherever there is conjoint activity whose consequences are
> appreciated as good by all singular persons who take part in it,
> and where the realization of the good is such as to effect an energetic
> desire and effort to sustain it in being just because it is a good shared
> by all there is in so far a community.[266]

For Dewey, there is no democracy without community and vice versa as the ultimate

ends of human energy is the free interaction of individuals who learn and grow together

over time. In this model of community, much of Dewey's philosophy is united and given

life in the ongoing shared experiences of individuals.

In "Creative Democracy-The Task Before Us," Dewey asks that we consider

democracy as a mode of intelligent action that leads to ongoing experiences. Recall

Dewey's notion of experience as an active process grounded in inquiry. These

experiences Dewey speaks of involve human interaction, which, in turn, lead to the

continued growth of individuals and society.[267] Dewey does not believe that isolated,

passive individuals hold the key to a more fulfilled life. Rather, Dewey argues:

> Democracy is the faith that the process of experience is more
> important than any special result attained, so that special results
> achieved are of ultimate value only as they are used to enrich
> and order the ongoing process. Since the process of experience

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[265] Ibid., 329.

[266] Ibid.

[267] John Dewey, "Creative Democracy-The Task Before Us," *John Dewey and the Promise of America,* Progressive Education Booklet 14 (1939), in *The Later Works of John Dewey, Vol. 14: 1939,* ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1989), 322.

is capable of being educative, faith in democracy is all one with
faith in experience and education. All ends that are cut off from
the ongoing process become arrests, fixations. They strive to fixate
what has been gained instead of using it to open the road and point
the way to new and better experiences.[268]

Again, Dewey holds that human beings must be free to interact with each other and

surrounding conditions so as to further the growth of each member of society, as well as

the community as a whole. Dewey believed foremost in the potentiality of human beings

when they are free to lead their own lives and make intelligent decisions grounded in

inquiry.

While Dewey refined his visions of democratic society in several of his works, he

also wrote extensively about the threats to such a society.[269] For Dewey, democratic

society was not a Utopian ideal; rather, it was an everyday process involving human

interaction and was therefore subject to human folly as well as human ingenuity. In

Freedom and Culture, Dewey warns that emergent communication technologies could be

used to undermine his notion of democratic society. Dewey asserts:

Other powerful factors in the interaction are those technologies
produced by modern science which have multiplied the means of
modifying the dispositions of the mass of the population; and which,
in conjunction with economic centralization, have enabled mass
opinion to be become like a physical goods a matter of mass production.
Here also is both a warning and a suggestion to those concerned with
cultural conditions which will maintain democratic freedom. The
warning is obvious as to the role of propaganda, which now operates
with us in channels less direct and less official. The suggestion is that
the printing press and radio have made the problem of the intelligent
an honest use of communication in behalf of openly declared public
ends a matter of fundamental concern.[270]

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[268] Ibid.

[269] See, for example, Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, and Dewey, *The Public and
Its Problems.*

Dewey, like the members of the Frankfurt School, was concerned that mass media would be used to manipulate public opinion through the distribution of misinformation and pabulum. In *Individualism Old and New*, he offers a similar treatise in arguing that, "…the press is the organ of amusement for a hurried leisure time, and it reflects and carries further the formation of mental collectivism by massed methods."[271] Dewey's comments here speak to his concern for the loss of the individual in an increasingly homogenized marketplace where mass production of opinion was not unlike the mass production of goods in an increasingly corporate-controlled twentieth century landscape.

Five years after *Individualism Old and New* was published Dewey confronted the massification of society and the dangers of capitalism in *Liberalism and Social Action*. Here Dewey extends his critique of individualism as the cornerstone of a capitalistic society that privileges competition and the will of the individual at the expense of the group.[272] Dewey argues that the "corrosive materialism" of the twentieth century was not born of science, but rather, the belief that human ingenuity should be put to use only for personal pecuniary and material benefit.[273] Dewey held that the materialism of his day was reinforced by the dominant class through direct measures via control of the army and the police, but also through indirect measures such as control over "the courts, schools, the press and radio."[274]

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[270] Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, 36.

[271] John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (New York: Capricorn, 1930/1962), 42.

[272] John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*.

[273] Ibid., 89.

[274] Ibid., 87.

For Dewey, controlling the press was an important part of that coercive power as the framing of public opinion was essential to maintaining status quo power structures. Consider the following passage from Dewey's *Ethics*:

> Hence we have today a multitude of agencies which skillfully manipulate and color the news and information, which circulate, and which artfully instill, under the guise of disinterested publicity, ideas favorable to hidden interests. The public press, which reaches almost every individual and which circulates cheaply and rapidly, affords an organ of unprecedented power for accomplishing a perversion of public opinion.[275]

It is clear that Dewey understood the reach of the public press, yet it is also clear that the was increasingly wary that the public press was subject to human manipulation. Dewey's concern that public opinion could be perverted by the press stems from his belief in freedom of expression as the cornerstone of the development of public opinion.

If public action can be controlled through the framing of public opinion, then any manipulation of public opinion can be seen as a threat to a Deweyan notion of democracy.[276] Dewey states this position succinctly in *The Public and Its Problems* where he writes, "The smoothest road to control of political conduct is by control of opinion."[277] If political conduct is linked to public opinion than it would seem important for those who wish to dictate political action to control public opinion through the control of communication technologies. In this sense, communication technologies, such as television, which changed the global landscape forever in the twentieth century, are

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[275] John Dewey, *Ethics*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, *v.7: 1932*, 361.

[276] Ibid., 360.

[277] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*. In *The Later Works of John Dewey, Vol.2*: *1925-1927*, 346.

subject to manipulation by those individuals who have the ability to influence what information is disseminated.

While Dewey was writing about the interconnectivity of public opinion and democracy, his writings were often directed at Walter Lippmann, a young journalist with whom Dewey fought an intermittent battle of ideas in the 1920s. Lippmann argued, with Dewey, that much of what individuals come to know via mass media was misinformation that had been scripted for them.[278] However, contra to Dewey, Lippmann argued that only specialized individuals could guide the population through the mass of misinformation.[279] In his book, *Public Opinion*, Lippmann argues that people know the world only as "a picture in their head," not in a direct relationship.[280] To know the world, people needed to be guided by external sources of pictures and information that were edited and refined for them by intellectuals whom Lippmann decried as more capable of such tasks. As Chomsky asserts, Lippmann was arguing for a "spectator democracy,"[281] and idea that stands opposed to Dewey's conception of democracy as active engagement.

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[278] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: The Free Press, 1922/1997).

[279] Ibid.

[280] Ibid., 31.

[281] Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1997), 6-7. This text offers a sweeping view of media propaganda in the twentieth century. Chomsky, who cites Dewey's theories of democracy as a major influence on his own work, traces the rise of the public relations industry in the United States and how that industry is used to manipulate public opinion and undermine democracy.

Following Dewey and Chomsky, Pierre Bourdieu argues that television is antithetical to democracy as television purports to record reality, when in fact reality is increasingly not described, but rather *prescribed* by television.[282] Bourdieu asserts:

> The political dangers inherent in the ordinary use of television have to do with the fact that images have the peculiar capacity to produce what literary critics call a *reality effect*. They show things and make people believe in what they show.[283]

Instead of television being a means by which we learn about the world, television increasingly informs us about how the world *should* be. In "telling" the population how the world should be, television programming can promote specific behaviors and attitudes. Television purports to present information that is relevant to *all* members of society; yet, it can be used to promote the ideals of the limited number of individuals who control what television reveals. In this sense, television can serve to undermine democracy, not only by encouraging passivity, but also by privileging certain experiences over others.

As a provider of information through its sounds and images, television has the ability to serve as both a mechanism for the transmission of factual information, as well as a means by which public opinion can be framed and manipulated. Recall from chapter four, Dewey's concern that the public press was becoming a tool of the elite class who maintained control of its communicative power. In this sense, television's potential to assist in the democratic exchange of ideas can be stifled by the interests of those individuals who decide what gets broadcast over the airwaves. More recently, Amy

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[282] Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television* (New York: The New Press, 1996). Italics in original.

[283] Ibid., 21.

Gutmann has argued that television watching is a lesson in "political passivity," and that television is incompatible with democratic culture.[284] Gutmann argues against television's role in undermining notions of democratic exchange.

Gutmann's argument is similar to Mander's notion of television as undemocratic discussed in chapter two. Gutmann also mirrors Kellner's argument in asserting that television produces a privatized, consumer culture but rarely promotes civic life and the public sphere."[285] As Jack Beatty argues, "Democracy depends on reason and a well-informed citizenry; television on the sub-rational manipulation of wants."[286] In a Deweyan sense, television promotes an individualistic, consumption-focused lifestyle that lies in opposition to his notions of democratic, associated living. Television does not promote democracy, nor does it forge an active public sphere. Television isolates, separates, and distracts individuals. Television watching retards one's desire and ability to engage in ongoing associations and experiences within a given community.

In this dissertation I argue that Dewey's concern regarding mass media's ability to manipulate public opinion would be heightened still had he lived to further experience the undemocratic potential of television. I argue that the isolative nature of television discussed earlier in this work, as well as the fact that television programming is controlled by a limited number of individuals, renders television oppositional to Dewey's

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[284] Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 239.

[285] Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, 105.

[286] Jack Beatty, "Television or Democracy?" *The Atlantic.com* (5/31/07). The article can be found at www.theatlantic.com/doc/200705u/gore-television. Last accessed July 21, 2008.

definition of democratic activity. I hold with Dewey's notion of democracy as being

realized in the associations and interactions amongst the members of any given society.

In a Deweyan sense, television, as a form of communication technology, could be used in

conjunction with human interaction where ideas are openly exchanged and debated. Or,

television could be used to prevent interaction and association from happening through

the proliferation of disinformation and distraction. I argue that television today does more

of the latter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Looking Ahead: Television and Schooling

Throughout the first three chapters of this dissertation I outlined both how television came to be such a prominent feature in modern culture, as well as examined the numerous historical and modern critiques of the influence of television on human behavior and culture. In chapter four, I brought a Deweyan focus to a critique of television as an institution in modern life. In this chapter, I discuss ways in which schools can become leading agents in helping students become media literate. Before doing so, I will engage in a brief discussion of Dewey's idea of education as a democratic process and my belief that media literacy is vital for any student who wishes to engage in a democratic educational experience. I hold that schools can and should engage students in confronting media as an integral part of a democratic education.

Education as a Democratic Process

John Dewey held throughout his life that public schools should function as real communities where students are educated to be active community members. As he noted in *The School and Society*, education should be, "a genuine form of active community life."[287] Dewey asserted that schools should not exist apart from real life, they should, instead, be communities where students learn to engage in interactive community life. As

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[287] John Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1900/1990),14.

Dewey had argued earlier in his career, "Apart from the thought of participation in social life the school has no end or moral aim."[288] In *Moral Principles of Education*, Dewey writes, "The school cannot be a preparation for social life excepting as it reproduces, within itself, typical conditions of social life."[289] Dewey believed schools should be arenas where genuine social interactions would teach students the "primal necessities of community life."[290] There is no isolated subject matter in the Deweyan curriculum, there is only the process of living that dictates the focus of the school. As Dewey asserts, when education and school activities are grounded in real social life issues, "A spirit of free communication, of interchange of ideas, suggestions, results, both successes and failures of previous experiences, becomes the dominating note of the recitation."[291] It is in these experiences that democratic education exists.

Recall from chapter four a discussion of Dewey's notion of democracy as a mode of "associated living." [292] As I understand Dewey, democracy is not an ethereal idea that exists outside of everyday life. Rather, democracy is an active process that affords individuals the opportunity to interact in social affairs, which allows for growth both as individuals and as part of the social group. Democracy protects human rights while

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[288] John Dewey, "The Ethical Principles Underlying Education," in *The Early Works of John Dewey, Vol. 5: 1882-1898*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1972), 62.

[289] John Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1909/1075), 14.

[290] John Dewey, *The School and Society*, 14.

[291] Ibid., 16.

[292] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 87.

embracing diversity. Democracy promotes the free interaction of individuals and the

collective action of the people for the good of the community, all of which has its roots in

democratic education. Dewey held that democratic communities should promote

democratic education in asserting

> Upon the educational side, we note first that the realization of a form
> of social lie in which interests are mutually interpenetrating, and where
> progress, or readjustment, is an important consideration, makes a democratic
> community more interested than other communities have cause to be in
> deliberate and systematic education.[293]

For Dewey, the idea that democracy requires an educated populace does not alone

satisfy the need for democratic education. Rather, Dewey believed that democracy thrives

when individuals engage in activities of interest to them such that all individuals must

"refer his actions to that of others, and consider the action of others to give point and

direction to his own."[294] It was Dewey's contention that democracy did not lie in the

hands of political experts, but rather, democracy was the work of teachers, students, and

the greater community.[295] Dewey saw public education as the means by which

democratic communities provide individuals with the opportunity to develop diverse

social relationships that would direct interactions so as to maintain the healthy

functioning of the democracy. Said differently, democratic communities are born of

democratic schools.

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[293] Ibid.

[294] Ibid.

[295] Oakes and Rogers, *Learning Power*, 19-20.

Following Deweyan notions of democratic education, Howard Zinn argues that schools face, and have always faced, a paradox in balancing ideas of democracy and education.[296] Schools speak of democratic ideals, but are too often mired in principles of standardization and corporatization to allow for the development of true democratic interaction among teachers and students. Giroux furthers this point in arguing that teachers are too subject to the authority of external bureaucracies to engage students in democratic inquiry.[297] Giroux argues that the free exchange of ideas in public school classrooms has been replaced by standardization, efficiency, and an embrace of market-driven notions of education.[298]

Accepting that democracy requires the free exchange of ideas and the promotion of interconnectedness and association, it is important to realize that formal public education in the United States is increasingly controlled by external bureaucracies that limit democratic interaction between students, teachers, and their communities. Zinn asserts:

> That is, while schools are charged with promoting a discourse of
> democracy, they often put structures in place that undermine the
> substantive democratic principles they claim to teach. As a result,
> schools are necessarily engaged in a pedagogy of lies that are shaped
> and supported by the interplay of the media, business interests, and

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[296] Howard Zinn and Donaldo Macedo, *Howard Zinn on Democratic Education* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2005).

[297] Henry Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism:Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2004), 46-47. For further discussion of the encroachment of the market on democratic education, see Deron Boyles, *American Education and Corporations: The Free Market Goes to School* (New York: Garland, 1998), and Kenneth Saltman, *The Edison Schools: Corporate Schooling and the Assault on Public Education* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[298] Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism*.

the academic enterprise…[299]

Zinn holds that schools do little to confront mass media messages that threaten the very essence of a democratic education where students, teachers, and the community would be engaged in ongoing inquiry. Zinn goes on to argue that students are bombarded by "lies facilitated by a pliant media, in schools that are supported by media propaganda reminiscent of totalitarian socialist states."[300] At the center of the distribution of media propaganda that Zinn argues against is television, which continues to play an important role in the lives of both students and teachers across the United States.

While one could argue that television is just one form of technology invading life today, I argue that television remains the most present and most easily accessible technology available to virtually the entire population. Further, recall from earlier in this dissertation that television viewing continues to increase despite the rise of the Internet and other personal communication devices.[301] With growing concern over the proliferation of the Internet, an argument that is critical of television may seem anachronistic today. However, while critical analysis of the Internet is warranted, I argue that there exists a greater opportunity for exposure to diverse, and perhaps subversive information on the Internet than there is on television. In this sense, television deserves evaluation as it continues to provide a narrow view of reality that privileges specific behaviors and cultural norms.

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[299] Zinn and Macedo, *Howard Zinn on Democratic Education*, 1.

[300] Ibid., 4. For further discussion of media propaganda and its influence on education and the shaping of public opinion, see Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*.

[301] Wallenstein, "TV Viewership Hits Record High."

In chapter four I discussed Dewey's notion that all human beings are influenced by social conditions and the norms of the culture into which they are born. Jim Garrison follows Dewey in arguing that human beings adopt cultures that are scripted, that our lives have been influenced by the values, beliefs, interests, and perceptions of the social contexts in which we live.[302] Garrison argues:

> We all live prescribed lives. Culture wrote the scripts for us in advance. They constrain our possibilities and control our thoughts, feelings, and actions. If we are ever to know ourselves, if we are ever to formulate our own answers to life's existential questions, if we are ever to be free, we must become reflectively aware of the cultural scripts that prescribe the roles we play.[303]

In a perfect world, the cultural scripts we inherit would be grounded in long-standing familial and community traditions. However, in today's world, much of the prescribed scripts we inherit come from television and mass media.[304] These mediated scripts influence the ways in which human beings interact with each other and the world and cannot be dismissed as simple amusement. As I have asserted throughout this dissertation, television continues to be a chief proponent of modern mediated scripts that influence human behavior.

Throughout the last fifty years, television programming has increasingly played a role in writing and rewriting cultural scripts. It is through television that children often learn for the first time about people outside their immediate family. It is also through

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[302] Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching*, 140-141.

[303] Ibid., 141.

[304] Ibid.

television that young people often learn their first lessons about violence and sexuality.[305]

It is through television that advertisers convince all of us, not just children, to covet the

latest desirable object. It is also through television that young people are exposed to the

newest cultural scripts, scripts based not on ancestral or familial tradition, but the

consumption of material things.[306] Elissa Moses, a leading figure in youth marketing,

asserts that American television is the cornerstone of the global teen culture, influencing

the consumer behavior of teens all over the world, not just the United States.[307] Moses

asserts that television is an effective means by which brands can reach the youth market

because the young growing minds are "fresh, open, and fair,"[308] and susceptible to

television's influence. It is Moses' contention that any company who wishes to access the

youth market have a strategy to reach them via American television.

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[305] Strasburger, "Clueless: Why Do Pediatricians Underestimate the Media's Influence on Children and Adolescents?" Strasburger asserts that television and media are powerful teachers that expose children to sex, violence, homicide, suicide, eating disorders and drug problems. Strasburger continues to advocate for pediatricians and educators to be more involved in teaching children and families about media literacy.

[306] Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004). See also, Budd, et al., *Consuming Environments: Television and Commercial Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999); and Ann De Vaney, "Reading the Ads," in *Watching Channel One: The Convergence of Students, Technology, and Private Business,* ed. Ann De Vaney (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 137-152.

[307] Elissa Moses, *The $100 Billion Allowance: Assessing the Global Teen Market* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000), 14-15.

[308] Ibid., 33.

Maxine Greene argues against the ongoing erosion of public action and critical

thinking skills in youth in looking at the role that modern media play in promoting

consumerism in young people. Greene asserts that

> Little is done to counter the media manipulation of the young into
> credulous and ardent consumers-of sensation, violence, criminality,
> things. They are instructed daily, and with few exceptions, that human
> worth depends on the possession of commodities, community status,
> a flippant way of talking, good looks. What they are made to believe to
> be the "news" is half entertainment, half pre-tenses at beings windows
> on the world. On television, they watch candidates being marketed and
> withdrawn. In the midst of the marketing and the sounds of sitcom
> shotguns, there are opportunities to become voyeurs of starvation, massacres,
> torture.[309]

Greene's point here is to argue against media-driven notions of a life of consumption, but

her comments also speak to Dewey's notion of the unconcerned spectator discussed in

chapter three. Greene argues

> Rather than being challenged to attend to the actualities of their lived
> lives, students are urged to attend to what is "given" in the outside world-
> whether in the form of "high technology" or the information presumably
> required for what is called "cultural literacy." Finding it difficult to stand
> forth from what is officially (or by means of media) defined as real, unable
> to perceive themselves in interpretive relation to it. The young (like
> their elders) are all too likely to remain immersed in the taken-for-
> granted and the everyday.[310]

In other words, we, as a culture, and especially our schools, do little to teach young

people to counter media messages. This is a point I explore in the next section of this

chapter.

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[309] Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 12-13.

[310] Ibid., 7.

Television, Schools, and Media Literacy

In *The School and Society,* John Dewey asserts that a school is a "miniature community, an embryonic society."[311] It was Dewey's contention that there was no special circumstance that delineates a school community as distinct from the larger community in which that school exists. Activity in school should be directed from natural impulses and needs just as life in a community is driven by the needs of its members. To this end, schools should, in a Deweyan sense, be centers of active inquiry into those issues that influence the lives of the students and teachers that live within the schools walls.[312] In this sense, schools need to become centers where critical issues that influence the lives of students, teachers, and the larger community are deconstructed and contested on an ongoing basis. It is my contention that one of the critical issues requiring deconstruction in today's schools is television.

Recall from earlier in this work that the amount of television programming consumed by young people in the United States continues to increase. Often, children begin watching television before their first birthday, laying the groundwork for a lifetime of viewing. Neil Postman argues that television represents the earliest curriculum that young people encounter, and it is a curriculum that prepares them to be passive, cooperative students.[313] Television does not lead students to become the active, inquiring beings Dewey argued for as discussed in chapter four of this dissertation. Rather, as Amy

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[311] Dewey, *The School and Society*, 18.

[312] Ibid.

[313] Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 59-60.

Gutmann asserts, television teaches students to be docile spectators who listen but do not

speak.

> By sitting in front of a television set, children learn that it is normal to
> listen but not to respond, to absorb information but not to inquire, to be
> loyal or to exit but not to raise their voice to criticism, and so on. Intellectual
> passivity lends itself to political apathy or mindless protest, neither of which
> are democratic virtues." [314]

Gutmann's notion here again recalls Dewey's disconnected spectator discussed in chapter

four. Gutmann holds that television programming is undemocratic and that it steers

children, not by content, but by its very structure, away from the democratic principles of

active criticism and participatory action.

Following the Deweyan idea of the disconnected spectator, and Gutmann's notion

of the disengaged citizen, Benjamin Barber argues that television subjugates democracy

in favor of promoting a life of consumption of material things. Barber asserts that

television serves the capitalist system of consumption as capitalism earns more from

"consumers who watch than consumers who do."[315] Barber argues that the televisual

voyeuristic mentality that television creates reduces everything-from tragedy to sex to

sports, and even politics, to the "affairs of spectators."[316] The contention here harkens

back to Dewey's idea of citizen disengagement wrought by the growing distraction of the

machine age[317] as democracy becomes something we "watch on TV rather than an

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[314] Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 238.

[315] Benjamin Barber, *Consumed*, 190.

[316] Ibid.

[317] See, for example, Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, and Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*.

activity we engage in."[318] Barber calls on adults to teach children to be critical of

television and other media and to rekindle a sense of civic responsibility.

Currently, as Joel Spring asserts, public schools are often complicit in promoting

a media-saturated, consumerist lifestyle, instead of helping children develop the skills

needed to question what television and other media technology teaches.[319] Too often, the

criticality Spring is calling for is subjugated by school-business partnerships that limit the

discourse in schools to fit a capitalist-consumerist model for education.[320] Further, as

Barber asserts, "Rather than employ schools to help children grow out of their toys-we

import toys into the schools-video games and computers as "edutainment" teaching aids,

as well as ad-sponsored TV in the classroom."[321] Where schools could assume a chief

role in the rejection and dissection of television culture, we often see, instead, an embrace

of that culture. I argue that schools need to be in the forefront in creating spaces where

young people can investigate and critique television's influence on youth culture.

Henry Giroux posits that in a media-saturated world, the socialization and

education of children must include teaching them to be critical observers of media, and

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[318] Barber, *Consumed*, 191.

[319] Joel Spring, *Educating the Consumer Citizen*: *A History of the Marriage of Schools, Advertising, and Media* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, 2003), 207-208.

[320] See, for example, Molnar, *School Commercialism: From Democratic Ideal to Market Commodity*; Boyles, *American Education and Corporations: The Free Market Goes to School*; and Spring, *Educating the Consumer Citizen*: *A History of the Marriage of Schools, Advertising, and Media.*

[321] Benjamin Barber, *Consumed*, 14.

its influence on democracy and agency.[322] Giroux holds that youth are too often excluded

from discussion of power and politics; yet, theirs is a media-saturated world offering up

an ongoing menu of cultural norms and values. Giroux asserts:

> The cultural authority of this postmodern media-scape rests on its power
> to usurp traditional sites of learning and its ability to expand the power of
> culture through an endless stream of signifying practices, which prioritize
> the pleasures of the image over the intellectual demands of critical inquiry.
> Moreover, it simultaneously reduces the demand of human agency to the
> ethos of a facile consumerism.[323]

In Giroux's model, the television and movie versions of childhood culture promote

consumerism over agency, rendering children into inconsequential consumers of fantasy

who rely on powerful corporate entities for entertainment and escape. Giroux asserts that

our increasingly commercialized world, saturated as it is with media messages, empties

our public dialogue of discourses of resistance which allows "critical reflection to give

way to the reified image of the spectacle."[324] Giroux's comments speak to Dewey's

notion of the disconnected spectator discussed in chapter four, where the individual is not

an actor, but a passive spectator. Giroux's comments also serve as a rejoinder to the more

recent comments of Gutmann and Barber presented at the beginning of this chapter.

If children and adolescents are to have the ability to resist television and other

communication technologies, they need to develop media literacy. Media literacy can be

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[322] Henry Giroux, *Stealing Innocence: Corporate Culture's War On Children* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

[323] Henry Giroux, "Animating Youth: The Disnification of Children's Culture," *Socialist Review* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 23-55.

[324] Giroux, *Stealing Innocence: Corporate Culture's War On Children*, 67.

defined in various ways; however, for this dissertation I employ a definition of media

literacy as having the "ability to critically interpret the powerful images of a multimedia

culture."[325] Moreover, media literacy "paves the way for mastering the skills required for

lifelong learning in a constantly changing world."[326] Teaching media literacy aims to help

young people "develop both critical understanding and active participation" in making

meaning of media.[327] Stuart Hall identifies mass media as "ideological apparatuses" that

influence how young people come to understand themselves and the world.[328] It is for

precisely this reason that Hall joins in the call for the development of media literacy in

young people.

Today, information reaches the general public not just through the printed word,

but through an ever-increasing barrage of sounds and images. It is important for anyone

today, but especially children to develop the ability to think critically about the multiple

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[325] Elizabeth Thoman and Tessa Jolls, "Media Literacy: A National Priority for a Changing World," *American Behavioral Scientist* 48, no.1 (September 2004): 18-29. The article is available online at http://www.ac.wwu.edu/~karlberg/444/readings/priority.pdf Last accessed 8/01/08. For a medical perspective on media literacy, see Michael Rich, "Is Television Healthy? The Medical Perspective," in *Children and Television: Fifty Years of Research*, eds. Norma Pecora, John P. Murray and Ellen Ann Wartella (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 109-147; and Budd, et al., *Consuming Environments*.

[326] Thoman and Jolls, "Media Literacy: A National Priority for a Changing World."

[327] David Buckingham, *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 4. Buckingham defines media literacy as an outcome of the skills acquired from the process of "teaching and learning about media."

[328] Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media, and the Ideological Effect," in *Mass Communication and Society*, eds. James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979), 315-348. Hall holds that media are central features in the shaping of young people's understanding of culture, ideology, and race.

media to which they are exposed. Recall from chapter three a discussion of how children are more susceptible than adults to television programming. To counter television's role in their lives, young people need to develop the tools needed to critique television and think critically about its role in their lives.

Elizabeth Thoman, founder of the Center for Media Literacy, has developed three key strategies for helping children develop media literacy in regard to television and other media technologies. Thoman's contention is that teaching young people to be media literate is as important as any other academic skill students learn in schools today.[329] Thoman ranks the three key strategies for developing media literacy in order from beginning to more advanced concepts:

1. Manage television time and the choices involved.

2. Developing critical viewing skills-understanding media frames.

3. Looking behind the frames-political, economic, and social analysis of the media.[330]

If young people are to be able to think critically about television, they must see it critically, and ask important questions about what television does to and for their lives.

Failing to help children develop media literacy, to distinguish between reality and the fantastic utopia of television and film, only perpetuates the power of media

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[329] Elizabeth Thoman, *Three Stages of Media Literacy* (Los Angeles, CA: Center for Media Literacy, 1995). The article can be found online at http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/media_literacy/what_is_media_literacy.cfm Last accessed 7/20/08.

[330] Ibid.

messages.[331] Moreover, it positions children to be more susceptible to television's and

other media's distribution of misinformation. As Hickman asserts, "Although there is no

place within a free society for the censorship of even what a majority perceives as

disinformation, it is also important that public education should foster the development of

the tools of critical intelligence by which information of all types can be evaluated."[332]

Hickman asks that we never cease to inquire as to what any new media means for our

experiences and everyday lives.

I join with Giroux and Hickman in arguing that schools should teach young

people to be critical of media, to become, as Giroux asserts, "critical agents able to

recognize, appropriate, and transform how dominant power works on and through

them."[333] Moreover, in recent years the medical community is increasing its call for the

teaching of media literacy. Since the late 1990s, *Media Matters*, a media literacy

campaign started by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), declared that media

literacy be treated as a "health intervention, and become a crucial part of the educational

and emotional development of all young people."[334] The goal, under Giroux's notion, or

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[331] Ibid. For further discussion of how media literacy is an essential component of teaching children to see beyond, and actively subvert our consumption-driven culture, see Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picado, 2002), Daniel Nicholson, "Developing a Media Literacy of Whiteness in Advertising," in *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America*, eds. Joe Kincheloe, Shirley Steinberg, Nelson Rodriguez, and Ronald Chenault (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998), 193-212, and Schor, *Born to Buy*.

[332] Hickman, *Philosophical Tools for Technological Tools*, 58.

[333] Henry Giroux, *Channel Surfing: Racism, The Media, and the Destruction of Today's Youth* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998), 32.

[334] Rich, "Is Television Healthy?" See also, Dimitri A. Christakis and Frederick J. Zimmerman, "Media as a Public Health Issue," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 160, (Spring 2006):445-446.

that of the AAP, is the development of young people who are critical evaluators of the role that television and other communication media play in their lives.

How might teachers and scholars come to understand media literacy as an intervention that is a crucial aspect of American education? More precisely, and for the purpose of this dissertation, how might teachers and students confront and critique television programming? Amy Gutmann contends that education, television, and democracy are tightly linked today as television is a foremost cultural device in the lives of American youth.[335] I hold with Gutmann in arguing that democratic education for a democratic society requires that we examine and critique the influence that television and other communication media have on the lives of students, teachers, and the community.

Why Are Students Not Critical of Television?

Minow and Lamay assert that one reason that the critical study of television is neglected in American schools is that teacher preparation programs and colleges also largely ignore television.[336] Minow and Lamay argue that television criticism is neglected in higher education outside of departments of communication, and they contend that for teachers and students to become critical observers of television, conversations about television must permeate teacher education programs.[337] As Carlos Cortes argues, there is not much interaction between education scholars and media scholars, something that is

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[335] Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 252.

[336] Minow and Lamay, *Abandoned in the Wasteland*, 140-141.

[337] Ibid.

evidenced by the fact that teacher education programs spend little time examining the influence that media and popular culture have on children.[338] The desired outcome of both parties is that teaching children and adolescents to be critical observers of media be on the minds and lips of all educators today.

In this chapter I have argued for the development of media literacy amongst young people so that they have the tools to be critical observers of television. When considering how best to accomplish this, the American Academy of Pediatrics has several suggestions for its own members. The APA asserts that pediatricians join with parents and schools to broaden media education in schools and the greater community.[339] Further, *The Future of Children*, a collaboration between Princeton University and *The Brookings Institution*, calls on schools to be leaders in teaching children to manage, decipher, and question media messages from television and other communication technologies.[340] Each of these organizations approaches the issue of children and media differently, yet their call for action speaks to the urgency of helping children develop media literacy.

Extending the work of the organizations discussed here, I present several suggestions for how teachers can help students use television as an object lesson through which students can develop criticality regarding communication media. For the purpose

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[338] Carlos Cortes, "Knowledge Construction and Popular Culture: The Media as Multicultural Educator," in *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, eds. James Banks and Cherry McGee Banks (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2001), 169-184.

[339] *Children, Adolescents, and Television*, Policy Statement of The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education (February 2001). The statement can be found at http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;107/2/423-426. Last accessed August 1, 2008.

[340] Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Elisabeth Donahue, "Introduction: Children and Electronic Media."

of this dissertation these recommendations focus on television, but these suggestions are applicable to the various communication media students experience today.

- Ask students in elementary school to become aware of how much television they watch and engage in a class project encouraging students to reduce overall time spent watching TV.

- Partner with parents in efforts to encourage the curtailment of home TV usage, especially during the school year.

- Engage middle and high school students in projects that challenge television programming by teaching students to not just watch television, but to work to decipher the messages behind the programs and advertisements

- Engage older students in a project on issues of representation on television. Students could analyze and critique issues of race, class, and gender in the popular programming they watch

- Work with older students on research into who controls television programming and how that influences what information gets broadcast.

- Create projects for older students to monitor the amount of television they watch and discuss what other activities television watching replaces in their lives.

These are just a few of the ways in which schools can contribute to the development of media literacy in students, while also allowing students to become more critical of television's influence in their lives on a daily basis.

As options for television viewing continue to grow so does the amount of programming available for consumption.[341] Ongoing technological advances continue to allow for the compression of digital information into smaller and smaller devices which creates greater ability for networks to broadcast television programming in smaller and smaller mobile devices.[342] For example, the latest episode of *American Idol* can be viewed over one's cell phone while stuck in traffic, or sitting in the back of Algebra class. Further, coupled with the increase in options for television viewing is the fact that television continues to be a central location for the ongoing promotion of a market-driven, consumptive lifestyle.[343] There are fewer and fewer spaces that are free from television and its ongoing stream of images, ads, and pabulum.

Living Without Television

This dissertation does not argue for the elimination of television programming, that argument has already been made by scholars such as Jerry Mander and Douglas

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[341] Todd Tarpley, "The Future of Televisual Media," in *The Faces of Televisual Media: Teaching, Violence, Selling to Children,* eds. Edward L. Palmer and Brian M. Young (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 27-40. Tarpley discusses recent advances in television technology that allow for television programming to be seen not just in the home, but in also in mobile and hand held devices.

[342] Ibid.

[343] Shalom Fisch, "Challenges for the Future of Educational Media," in *The Faces of Televisual Media: Teaching, Violence, Selling to Children, eds.* Edward L. Palmer and Brian M. Young, eds. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 125-142. Fisch asserts that television programming continues to permeate nearly every aspect of modern life. There are television sets in schools, medical offices, hair salons, and bus terminals and most of the programming stresses the importance of a market-driven lifestyle. See also Spring, *Educating the Consumer Citizen*: *A History of the Marriage of Schools, Advertising, and Media*; and Schor, *Born to Buy.*

Kellner.[344] However, while my goal was not to argue for doing away with television entirely, it is worth noting current research regarding people who choose to live without television. Contrary to popular assumption, there are people who choose to live without television. In her new book, *Living Without the Screen*, Marina Krcmar found that there are a small percentage of Americans who live without televisions in their homes and lives.[345] The individuals in Krcmar's research that did not own televisions fell into two broad groups. One group is made up of individuals who see themselves as part of a counter culture that refuses to succumb to the commercialized culture that television represents. In the other group are individuals who consider themselves conservative Christians who reject the immorality that they perceive in much of television programming.[346]

Krcmar interviewed one hundred and twenty adults and children from sixty-two different household who do not watch or own a television.[347] Based on the interviews, Krcmar found that those who do not watch television due not only reject the consumerism and violence of television, but also to encourage family interaction, and to teach children to be more creative with their free time.[348] Recall from earlier that two of

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[344] See Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, and Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy.*

[345] Marina Krcmar, *Living Without The Screen* (New York: Routledge, 2008). In her research Krcmar found that about 1% of the U.S. population chooses to not own a television in the home.

[346] Ibid., 10-11.

[347] Ibid.

[348] Ibid.

the main arguments against television is that it causes distance between family members and leads children to be passive and less creative with their play time. However, it is also important to note that Krcmar found that the children in her research who did not watch television faced a loss of social capital among their peers as they could not join in conversations about popular shows and television celebrities.[349] Due to television occupying such a prominent place in American life, lacking television literacy may put children at risk of being ostracized from their peer group and at a disadvantage in school-related activities that require a familiarity with popular culture.[350]

Closing

As discussed in chapters two and three, there *are* ways in which television may be used to promote interaction and interconnectedness in a Deweyan sense. John Dewey was a critic of communication media, but he was also a believer in the potential of communication to help *all* people live a richer, freer, and more examined life. To argue that Dewey would simply condemn television without noting its potential for informing the general public would be a mistake. It is probable, however, that had Dewey lived to further experience the medium of television, he would have been a critical observer of television's conspicuous place in modern life. Dewey would not accept television as a given in the modern world; rather, he would ask that individuals continually question what role television and other communication technologies plays in their lives. As Larry

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[349] Ibid.

[350] Ibid.

Hickman poignantly asserts

> If Dewey were alive today, he would surely recognize that the phase of the electronic revolution that we are now entering will radically alter the ways in which publics are formed and the means by which they interact with one another. Because productive pragmatism is democratic at its core, and because it is experimental in the sense that the technological disciplines are experimental, it always asks whether new forms of technology will tend to support or undercut democratic procedures and institutions.[351]

Hickman's assertion that Dewey would not have remained silent had he lived to see the changes that television brought to modern society, speaks to the overarching theme of my work here.

In myriad ways cited in this dissertation, television viewing contradicts Deweyan notions of democracy, experience, and knowledge acquisition. However, I do also acknowledge that television was the prominent means of information distribution for the general public throughout the 20th century. Recall from earlier in this paper the ways in which television was and is seen as an educational tool. While there are undoubtedly some instances in which television provides individuals with learning opportunities, I assert that television does not promote the types of educative experiences Dewey sought as television continues to separate viewers from real experience. In a strictly Deweyan sense, television negatively influences educative experiences as it emanates from a source that is external to the viewer and renders the viewer a disconnected spectator.

My goal for this dissertation was to explore television's place in modern life by offering a critique of the medium based in several of Dewey's philosophical positions. I hold that in its current form, much of television's content, as well as the act of television viewing, stands in opposition to Dewey's notions regarding experience, knowledge, and

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[351] Larry Hickman, *Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture*, 59.

democracy. In a Deweyan sense, television warrants ongoing inquiry and analysis as it

continues to influence the ways in which human beings experience, understand, and

interact with each other and the world.

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