

JOHN CALDWELL **CONVERGENCE TELEVISION:
AGGREGATING FORM AND REPURPOSING CONTENT
IN THE CULTURE OF CONGLOMERATION**

I was on a panel called “Profiting from Content,” which was pretty funny considering no one thinks we can.—Larry Kramer, CEO, CBS Marketwatch.com, quoted in *American Way*, December 15, 2000

“The New Killer App [television]”—title of article from *Inside*, December 12, 2000

With the meteoric rise and fall of the dot-coms between 1995 and 2000, high-tech media companies witnessed a marked shift in the kind of explanatory discourses that seemed to propel the media toward an all-knowing and omnipresent future-state known as “convergence.” Early adopters of digital technology postured and distinguished their start-ups in overdetermined attempts to promote a series of stark binaries: old media versus new media, passive versus interactive, push versus pull. These forms of promotional “theorization” served well the proprietary need for the dot-coms to individuate and to sell their “vaporware” (a process by which products are prematurely hyped as mere concepts or prototypes before actual products are available, all in an effort to preemptively stall the sales and market share of existing products by competitors). Both practices—theorizing radical discontinuity with previous media and hyping vaporware—proved to be effective in amassing inordinate amounts of capital and in sending to the sidelines older

competitors that actually had a product to sell. The tenor of this technorhetorical war changed, however, after the high-tech crash. Many observers now recognized that a phalanx of old-media players had, in fact, steadily weathered the volatile shifts during this period, and they did so with greater market share and authority than ever before. Far from being eclipsed by digital start-ups, television engaged and even welcomed the threat, proving that its historic prowess in entertainment, programming, and the economic realities of electronic media distribution gave it a set of comprehensive corporate skills well suited to tame the wild speculations of the dot-com world. Bankruptcy-prone media event/entities like DEN and pop.com might have garnered industry buzz as hip synergy-targets at Sundance, but television-Net initiatives had the National Association of Broadcasters, a wealth of prestige programming, adaptable technical infrastructure, and thousands of profit-focused electronic media facilitators and affiliates that were already "networked." In frustrated attempts to force the technical hand of "broadband" convergence, many newly tempered visionaries now conceded what had earlier only been a nagging hunch: a workable broadband network may already be in place—something called television.

Make no mistake, television did not assume its formidable position as a major player in digital media by having mastered and controlled the instabilities of the new technologies and practices. Far from it. The shift to digital created tremendous anxieties and a series of abortive responses from broadcasters because it threatened many of the most central tenets that had made the industry profitable over several decades. Consider, in this regard, how digital technologies have threatened the very centrality of TV's historic cash cow: syndication. Most academic histories of television focus almost exclusively on network television and ignore the fundamental role that the sale of independently produced series to individual and affiliated stations have played in the history of the medium. While the popular press typically conflates syndication with "reruns" of network shows, this gloss overlooks the vast number of series sold directly (usually for off-prime-time) across both domestic and international markets. Such syndication rights have for many years stood as central deal makers or breakers in television negotiations and development. The advent first of multichannel cable competition and then of digital technologies continues to threaten the place and value of syndication rights in the industry.

While the trades have spent considerable ink in hand-wringing speculation on the impact of Web "surfing" and "browsing" on advertising and sponsorship (which, in turn, has had considerable impact on the

form that convergence has taken in television), less attention has been paid to the impact that those same user behaviors have had on syndication. New products/services like octopus.com, for example, give users the ability to download software that allows the user to click-and-compile sites and fragments of sites that the user wishes to view on a regular basis. This, in essence, automatically rips image/sound/data "content" from numerous commercially sponsored, proprietary, and advertised sites and compiles the gleaned material daily (without ad banners, buttons, or secondary matter) as a personalized site/document that can be distributed and forwarded at will by the octopus compiler. The impact of this kind of counter- or "meta-browsing" is not lost on commercial developers and dot-com investors worldwide: even the best-laid Web-design e-strategies, subscriptions, and e-commerce schemes are worthless if one's proprietary content ends up "republished" on the screen of any user who wishes to reconfigure and "syndicate" it. Owners lose control of revenue streams, user tracking, headlines, and ad impressions as users (now) automatically edit, personalize, and distribute content. Nervous Web developers and content owners ponder whether to counterattack themselves against meta-browsing, as they did with Napster and Scour for their "infringements." Portals that contractually promise their clients exclusivity and control of the context in which their content is seen, for example, can now no longer guarantee that the same content will not appear alongside their competitors' content.¹ Unlike the first generation of "unruly" analog users who threatened ad rates with VCR time-shifting and remote-control surfing, digital meta-browsing means not only that editorial control is in the hands of users but that it is also immediately and widely distributable by others. The syndication industry will again have to reinvent itself to insure profitability, even as advertisers have had to reinvent strategies in the face of personalized "bots" that aggregate and individuate content automatically for viewer-users. Given this kind of dynamic, it is clear that new modes of media delivery and television-Net convergence also have an impact on television's textual forms and the ways we relate to television itself.

AN "AESTHETIC" OF CONVERGENCE TV?

Even though ours has been characterized as a "postnetwork" or "post-television" era, television as an institution has proven resilient in adapting to a series of fundamental economic, technological, and cultural changes. In this essay I examine how the proliferation of forms in American television since 1990 developed through a pattern of industrial negotia-

tions by practitioners. My intent here is both to describe a series of changes in television's textual forms and to reconsider methods of aesthetic analysis in television studies itself. By describing how various "cultures of production" mediate economic and cultural instabilities, I hope to shift the focus of analysis from aesthetics to notions of performance (how form is sociologically and industrially produced) and then to notions of "distributed cognition" (or how TV form emerges from broad but unstable networks of codified and contested industrial rationality). By doing this I intend to demonstrate the importance of a broad range of activities I group under the term "critical industrial practice." In addition, I want to show how these practices animate the industrial shift toward tactics of "aggregating," "migrating," and "repurposing" content.

Efforts to delineate a television aesthetic certainly stood as reasonable in what is still seen as the network era, a period of very real industrial oligopoly and apparent narrative homogeneity; a period perhaps constituted by the very "mass" culture premise in academia that somehow construed TV as one thing. In the 1970s and 1980s, attempts to nail down a television "aesthetic" (although this apparently archaic word was seldom used) were wide ranging. Critical scholars explained TV form by reference to a set of privileged generic modes and structural tropes;² to essential forms of distracted and fragmented subjectivity;³ to semiotic taxonomies and descriptive schemes;⁴ or to overarching narratological paradigms.⁵ Within this broad movement to finally take seriously and to systematically understand television form, many scholars also insisted that such forms only made sense if understood within the logics of industry, ideology, and political economy.⁶ This subsequent move to ground television critical studies historically demonstrated how television screen form was also fully complicit in programming tactics and political economy.⁷

These two critical phases fit well with the respective objects of analysis with which theory chose to tangle. The initial deconstruction by academic television studies of a common television form in the 1970s and early 1980s matched the overdetermined way that the networks themselves made television out to be one thing as well in the age of "broadcasting." Subsequently, the integration of political, economic, and cultural history with textual analysis in the late 1980s and 1990s came at a time when diversity was being industrially produced in an overdetermined way in a multichannel era known as "narrowcasting." These scholars fought the utopian gloss of endless diversity promised in the new age of cable and postnetwork television by taking television to task as a more fully historical phenomenon. Yet, I would argue, the current imbrication

of digital technologies and the Internet with television further shatters the authority that either of these two models—broadcasting or narrow-casting—can have on critical analysis. To understand dot-com/TV permutations, TV-Web synergies, multichannel branding, and marketed poses of “convergence,” scholars need to pay as much attention to the communities and cultures of production as they do to either political economy or ideologically driven screen form. The instabilities at play now—in labor relations, technological obsolescence, runaway production, and production economies—make the earlier advent and threat (to television) of HBO, CNN, and MTV seem moderate by comparison. It is within this present instability that the interplay between screen form, critical-industrial competence, and socio-professional interactions are most evident. Studying television’s “production of culture” is simply no longer entirely convincing if one does not also talk about television’s “culture of production.”

UNEASY NEIGHBORS: THE TENTATIVE AFFINITIES OF LOCAL PRODUCTION CULTURES

It is useful to consider the forms of convergence television not as mere textual or stylistic preoccupations but as Geertzian examples of “local knowledge.”⁸ Far from monolithic, the television industry is actually comprised of many very different local industries locked into a world of “willed affinity.” This affinity stands as a convenient common front for “the industry” only as long as business relations can guarantee stable markets and economies of scale. Recent changes in technology (immersive stylistics, nonlinear editing, computer generated imagery [CGI], and digital interactivity) have heightened the facility and prowess of professionals even as they have threatened substantive changes in the ways that TV is made, delivered, and consumed. Faced with threats of industrial instability, local production communities mount a wide range of discursive, iconic, and ritual forms to (therapeutically) work through institutional anxieties and to (cognitively) rationalize and respond to threats to practice.⁹ These industrial rituals and icons—circulated among practitioners to make sense of change—also directly impact and animate the program texts that audiences see at home.

While many media theorists spent their time speculating on polar oppositions between “push” media (TV) and “pull” media (digital media and the Net),¹⁰ fewer recognized one increasingly obvious trend: television had long been making itself a “pull” medium (through interactivity), even as it merged and conglomerated in an unequivocal bid to

make the Internet a viable “push” medium through the deployment of programming and advertising strategies.¹¹ Unlike television’s smug but naive disregard of cable in the early 1980s—an upstart that ultimately hijacked over half of the TV audience—television was now, in effect, “covering its bets.” That is, TV continued with its tried and proven success at programming, production, and marketing, even as it simultaneously invested in an array of start-ups and new technologies that could—if successful—ultimately cripple television. The unashamed investment by NBC, for example, in two new corporate enemies that promise to abolish TV advertising—the personal video recorder (PVR) companies TiVo and ReplayTV (whose PVR units allow viewers to skip ads in programs stored on their hard drives)—bear out this logic of planned corporate bet covering and equivocation. President Bob Wright of NBC laid out the preemptive logic of this kind of legal, boardroom surveillance: “[Our] company invested in both TiVo and Replay in part to keep track of the mayhem they could cause. We thought it was smart technology, but we weren’t sure how it would be deployed.”¹²

With this strategy, Wright and NBC brought to programming in the digital age the wisdom “that one should keep one’s enemy close,” but all of this pushing and pulling and merging and jockeying for position in the face of digital had a far different effect on the ground and in the industries. That is, the studios, network control rooms, story sessions, and guildhalls in Los Angeles and New York all began to evidence great anxieties and volatilities during this period. Members of the television production communities arguably faced a far more uncertain future than those above them in the boardrooms. For while Hollywood and television have jumped into digital with great public confidence, the lived communities that comprise those public fronts have had to navigate and negotiate change in ways that have substantively transformed what television looks like and sounds like in the age of digital.

Televisual form in the age of digital simply cannot be accounted for without talking about the institutional forces that spur and manage those forms. Before returning at the end of this essay to consider the broader questions that tie televisual change to issues of conglomeration, labor, and changes in advertising, I will lay out here what I consider to be five fundamental changes in the look of television that have been driven by the institutional instabilities that I described above. These five elements include ancillary textuality (repurposing, migrating content); conglomerating textuality (convergence texts, TV/dot-com sites); marketing textuality (branding); ritual textuality (pitching, writing by committee); and programming textuality (stunting, sweeps). Even though the industry

emphasis on some of these forms and strategies prefigured and continues alongside the widespread digitalization of television, all the forms aspire to the very conditions and endgame that digital formats discursively anticipate in what might be called the age of “convergence television.” In this way, the institutional practices described in the next section (repurposing, branding, pitching, stunting, and syndication) might be thought of as “protodigital” institutional strategies insofar as they both prefigure and bridge television’s current and final transition to digital technology and digital content.

FORMS OF CONVERGENCE TELEVISION

“UPN’s fate is still in the air, but for the time being, the network’s affiliate body isn’t interested in becoming a dumping ground for rehashed Viacom and CBS programming.”¹³ So went the spin as the UPN affiliate station group owners fought back attempts by its new takeover owners, Viacom and CBS, to use the sixth and weakest network as a dumping ground for syndicated and repurposed content, like MTV’s recycled series *Celebrity Deathmatch*. In stressing the need to maintain its brand even after takeover, UPN President Dean Valentine stated that “re-purposing clearly doesn’t work toward that end.”¹⁴ While the trades treated this stand as a corporate merger threat, UPN’s resistant pose functioned more to show how conglomeration threatened another fundamental component of American television: syndication, or what has come to be known as repurposing and migrating content. The prospects of an endlessly expanding multichannel market in the 1980s and 1990s changed the way studios and production companies thought about their television product. During the network era of the 1960s and 1970s, TV shows aired, reran, and came and went in a descending temporal sequence defined by their initial air-date hyped by a major network. Reruns and second-run syndication deals simply allowed program owners to collect the remaining surplus value of series in the less prestigious worlds of distribution outside of both prime time and the networks. But then cable television in the 1980s and the Internet in the 1990s demonstrated—far more dramatically than the networks would have liked—that the real programming game in town was not going to be about initial air-dates, but about syndication rights.

With the flurry of dot-com activity attached to studios and networks in the late 1990s, the syndication lesson was further underscored: an endless “ancillary afterlife” was now a possibility for all shows; if not in off-prime-time, then in digital form; if not on or with the parent corpo-

ration, then with a subsidiary corporation.¹⁵ At least four changes are apparent in the new business and discursive practices that media corporations began deploying in trades and industry gatherings. All of these changes in symbolic capital encourage and stimulate the volatility of televisual form and the extensions and permutations of program texts. First, the “shelf life” of a show or series became increasingly important to program owners and networks in deciding which shows to develop. Syndication possibilities and foreign distribution in particular are now always very much on the mind of producers and executives, so much so that such perspectives encourage a “collage” approach to series development and a penchant for aggregating an ensemble of actors and story lines that will travel across national boundaries. In this way, first-run syndicated shows like *Acapulco Heat* mixed elements of *Baywatch* and *James Bond*, as well as Latin American and an international ensemble of European and American stars, to give the series “legs” in international distribution. Meanwhile, Pamela Anderson’s *V.I.P.* mixed elements of *Baywatch*, *James Bond*, *Charlie’s Angels*, and soft-core porn to cut across restrictive, demographic segments in the domestic market.

Second, studios and companies began to publicly refer to their archives as “legacy” holdings. No longer simply backlot warehouses of old program masters, prints, tapes, and dupe negs, studios like Universal and Warner Bros. hired professional archivists even as they remastered everything in the vaults for the new ancillary uses. Third, after the FCC relaxed the financial-syndication rules that had placed strict limits on the number of syndicated shows a network could own since the 1970s (rules that had once protected syndication rights for independent producers), the networks now used their position as the gatekeepers of broadcast to leverage increasingly more control over the syndication rights of programs. By the late 1990s independent program producers without “sweet-heart deals” frequently complained that the networks were favoring their own in-house productions (over independently produced programs) when it came time to make the tough decisions about how, when, and what series to green-light, schedule, promote, or cancel. Fourth, two other paradigms began to eclipse the central importance traditionally assigned to the network broadcast as the primary benchmark of value: the lucrative possibilities of migrating content and program repurposing.

Consider the repurposing possibilities that emerged when the heretofore traditional NBC took on the market-share challenge of cable and digital. At least initially, the network news division drove the proliferation of NBC texts by repurposing news stories and talk shows for CNBC, MSNBC, and the MSNETWORK. Corporate heavyweights Microsoft and

NBC cooked up these kinds of synergies in a cross-media/cross-delivery onslaught, and by 2000 NBC threw down the gauntlet to even bigger globalizing Net success stories AOL and Yahoo when it rebranded its own online Internet activities (then named snap.com) as a comprehensive, one-stop entertainment and shopping Web service called NBCi. All of the erstwhile hype about how “new media” would replace “old-media” dinosaurs like network television now carried little credibility at GE/NBC. A place at the new media table would be assumed by NBC even as CNN and ABC/ESPN/Disney had done. Bits and pieces of hybridized news-anchor Brian Williams now show up in the form of migratory texts customized and endlessly individuated as e-content for NBC, MSNBC, CNBC, MSNETWORK, and NBCi.

Consider the daunting programming challenge that was ably met by this repurposing and hybridizing process. Not much more than ten years ago, NBC had but one half hour of network prime-time news to fill. Now the corporation has to program hundreds of hours per day with “new” programs across various electronic and digital networks. With a much lower cost to produce per minute than that of dramatic or entertainment programming, news production on videotape proved to be the perfect vehicle for this new corporate focus on repurposing. Tape, after all, can be endlessly recut and graphically stylized in digital postproduction. By 2000, the widespread use of digital servers (allowing random and multiple access to image and sound) makes the task of finding and incorporating archived file footage far less daunting. It also allows various divisional iterations of NBC nearly simultaneous access to the same footage and graphics. Also, unlike the textual “resistance” that an hour-long narrative arc in a prime-time show or a movie of the week places in the face of would-be abridgers, cutters, and repurposers, news is sound-bite and image driven, making it far more suited to the cable and Web programmers, who must tackle their urgent obligation to cut-and-paste, reformat, and extend “content.”

The rhetorical shift from talking about productions as “programs” to talking about them as “content” underscores the centrality of repurposing in industrial practice. The term “content” frees programs from a year-long series and network-hosted logic and suggests that programs are quantities to be drawn and quartered, deliverable on cable, shippable internationally, and streamable on the Net. At industry summits, conventions, trade shows, and trade journals a newer generation of market-conscious “developers” at NBC, ABC, CBS, Time Warner, and Paramount spread the gospel of “repurposing content” and “migrating content” to this or that “platform.” The old media corporations—defined historically

by the entertainment experience of the screen, the narrative, the star, and the genre—now work to calculate, amass, repackage, and transport the entertainment product across the borders of both new technologies and media forms.

A second trend that has fueled the volatility of televisual form in the digital area might best be termed convergent or “conglomerating textual-ity,” a practice that is apparent in numerous TV/dot-com sites. Through this practice entertainment companies intend to recapture, in the words of Michael Hiltzik, both “their brands (and) their business.”¹⁶ The term convergence is much bandied about now in almost every media and industry forum. The megaconvention of the National Association of Broadcasters (the NAB, an “old media” association guarding the interests of television stations nationwide) in Las Vegas in 2000 was anointed and hyped as the “convergence marketplace” by its sponsors. Everyone seems to believe in the imminent arrival of convergence but many still disagree about what the principle will mean in practical terms. “Broadband” (a big enough digital “pipeline”) is currently the key word for the trigger delivery system that will allow for the transmission, multiplexing, and interaction of multiple streams of digital content. But the computer industry has always envisioned broadband as an extension of its focus on data management, interactivity, communications, and gaming while the motion picture industry has added broadband to its equation and plans for the domestic delivery of “electronic cinema.”

Meanwhile, the television industry (and far more so than either the computer or film industries), brings to the groundswell of anticipation for broadband and the Internet its obsession with advertising, sponsorship, and programming. Of the three industries, television is more effectively mastering e-entertainment than either the film or high-tech worlds. Rather than focusing on the goal of HDTV (high definition) which it publicly (and ironically) whines about (because of the high cost of shifting from analog to high definition), television executives immediately saw in broadband an alternative—the possibility of “multiplexing.” Ever focused on bottom-line profitability, broadcasters intended to exploit multiplexing’s ability to offer simultaneous and ancillary digital streams (data, image, sound, interactivity). These ancillary channels promise to further engage and activate the audience, thereby bringing more of the viewer-user’s dollars back to the programming source. Multiplexed content now includes everything from background information, stock quotes, commentary, ancillary image and sound streaming, and the numerous forms of merchandizing that are inevitably glommed onto the ostensible focus of television’s broadband transmission: the program or content.

Rather than place its bets on high resolution and cinematic illusion and effects, TV has argued for low resolution—a gambit that allows it to program, quantify, and stream far more than one channel of content. Television has also always been defined by and demeaned because of its “clutter.” Television’s presence on the Net carries on this fine and dubious distinction, but few critics of the ad banners and graphic morass that make the Net cluttered acknowledge that television has also always known how to take electronic clutter to the bank. Once again on the Net, and faced with the lure of high resolution alternatives favored by digital cinema (which would enable video-on-demand delivered digitally in the form of pay-per-view or subscription), many current TV-Net initiatives have opted for the far more complex, and lucrative, form of multiplexed broadband streaming.

Web sites for TV operative on the Net demonstrate the complicated strategies by which television in the digital age continues to extend its historical niche as a form of entertainment commerce. The most effective Web sites for TV succeed by keeping viewer-users engaged long after a series episode has aired, and this requires greatly expanding the notion of what a TV text is. Shows accomplish this through at least six on-line strategies: “characterized” proliferations of the text; “narrativized” elaborations of the text; “backstory” textuality; “metacritical” textuality; technological augmentations; and merchandizing augmentations. *Dawsonscreek.com*, for example, offers to its Web fans numerous possibilities to interact by utilizing each of these six modes. It makes special efforts, for example, to benefit from characterized proliferations by providing users with Web access to the “personal lives” of its many characters and actors. The wind-swept icon of one character, Joey, seductively entices users to “click here” to delve more into her personal life. At the same time the site also enables visitors to explore all of the show’s four main characters through their “computers” (which appear as convincing simulations of Microsoft Windows icons and layout). To convince viewers that they are actually in the position to access the television characters’ computers, the site’s design graphically mimics “real” computer environments. Each week one of four different desktops is featured so that visitors can voyeuristically peak into a range of digital artifacts from the characters: “private” e-mails, AOL-style “instant messaging” chats, journals, and even (faux) trash cans. Through this interchange, visitors to “Dawson’s desktop” are set up and positioned as unseen “hackers,” secretly surveying not just the characters’ personal computers but the characters’ “real-time” Web chat as well, scripted and naturalized to mimic the kinds of dialogue viewers have experienced on the televised show proper.

The Web site also sets up access opportunities for "intimacy." Users can find out, for example, who's on Joey's Christmas list or what she has written in her "college essay." This kind of backstory elaboration fleshes out character biographies in far more detail than could be done in a broadcast episode, and it makes the users better narrative decoders of the series as well. Users are thus sutured into the world of the characters throughout the week through variously coded Internet activities. Having in one episode departed from the fictional town of Capeside, Andie has ostensibly been sending her friends postcards "from Europe" (Tuscany, Milan, Florence). The show then allows real users to sign up to receive an e-mailed postcard each time Andie reaches a new city or location in Europe. This kind of narrativized elaboration of the text works by allowing the narrative arc of the show (and the narrative reception of the show) to "continue" outside of the show itself. In further linking the electronic and virtual fiction with the user's real electronic activity, the Web site then allows those same recipients to "forward" Andie's postcards to their own friends by using real e-mail addresses. This device is an effective mechanism that allows the producers to further aggregate fans for the show— with virtual e-mail triggering a proliferation of "real" e-mails through the fan base.

The show's Web site also utilizes technological augmentations of the text to secure an ongoing relationship with viewers in "off-air" time. By downloading or utilizing QuickTime or Real Video motion-image protocols, the site invites viewers to take a 360-degree "virtual tour" of the show's Potter's Bed and Breakfast (a real set in the production, but a fictional building on the show). This augmentation thereby enables viewers to live vicariously in a constructed diegetic world and space outside of the show. They do so, furthermore, in a "place" that allows them to "book reservations" and to "read the guest book" in order to discern the identities of other guests that have stayed at the B&B. Technological augmentations also include another "fictional" Web site accessed through a link (Capesidehigh.com) that lets the visitor read a "real" newspaper printed at the show's fictional high school. After listening to the show's theme song on Real Audio (another downloadable extension) users can then purchase the music online (crossing yet another technical format).

The merchandizing augmentations on *Dawsonscreek.com* most fully betray the centrality of e-commerce in Web site design and operational practice. In the early years of the Web, television and film producers were publicly content to justify their expensive Web site initiatives as loss leaders or as a form of "value-added" to their existing entertainment properties or content. With the growing ubiquity of online shopping,

however, TV Web sites now almost always exploit one of the few proven methods of returning capital on the Net. The *Dawsonscreek.com* online "store," for example, features sale items for the high-school-bound user: student planners, key chains, buttons, and locker magnets are sold in a way that extends the show's text into the fans' very real spaces—spaces far from either Hollywood's Capeside or the user's home and Internet connection. Users on the site are encouraged to "shop the creek" for novels, collector's books, and posters to pin up on bedroom walls. With improved streaming technologies and software links now embedded during video postproduction, many shows now go a step further by allowing viewers to immediately click on a sweater, garment, or prop worn or used by an actor. Doing so allows the user to purchase, ship, and import a show artifact to the very nondiegetic world of the audience. In this way, convergent merchandizing augmentations work to narrativize the world of the user rather than vice versa.

If merchandized augmentations smack of complete viewer co-optation by the producing entity, another mode counterposes commerce with a format that is in many ways more critical. Metacritical augmentations such as *TVGuide.com* and *E!* (*Eonline.com*) are among the most popular television Web sites, offering as they do scheduling information, critical reviews, news items, and bits of backstory. Many successful Web sites have learned valuable lessons from composite print-broadcast-online entities like these. Such sites suggest that criticism and analysis—even when negative and internalized—help fuel the entertainment machine. In this way, *Dawsonscreek.com* is like the official *X-Files* and *MTV* sites. All allow the viewer-user to weigh in with critical analysis and dialogue on the given series. These critical reflections are solicited both through fan chat rooms and with contests and polls that allow viewers to vote on, in *dawsonscreek.com* for example, such nonofficial PR spins as "the worst part of season four."

As I have argued elsewhere, any interactivity (good, bad, or indifferent) is economically valuable to producers and has been a defining goal of broadcast television since its inception in the 1940s.¹⁷ These six recurrent forms of online textual elaboration, proliferation, and augmentation—all simultaneously operative in successful TV Web sites like *Dawsonscreek.com* and *TheXfiles.com*—also provide producers, studios, and advertisers with an expansive text that dwarfs the traditional thirty- and sixty-minute time slots of traditional shows. Convergent TV Web sites, therefore, represent a kind of model for the mutating, migrating, and aggregating textual ideals of contemporary industrial practice.

The next industrial trend that has altered the very way that television

looks and sounds is “branding” (marketing forms). The venerable “eye” of CBS (which was known in the 1950s and 1960s as the “Tiffany” network due to its high quality news division) and the once proud “peacock” of NBC easily ruled the roost of public consciousness as corporate symbols that stood above all sorts of lesser fare in the network era of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, by the mid 1990s, a large array of multichannel competitors had taken away the very viewership base that made the eye and the peacock almost universally recognized symbols in households across America. A few years earlier this decline in viewership and brand identity forced a boardroom shakeup at CBS, a takeover by GE of NBC, and a takeover by Capital Cities of ABC. A few years later a second wave of takeovers and mergers followed when the same networks were the takeover targets of Viacom (CBS) and Disney (ABC), and, in 2004, Vivendi-Universal merged with NBC. With upstarts like HBO, MTV, CNN, ESPN, Fox, WB, and UPN “cluttering” up corporate identities along with program choices in viewer living rooms, the major TV networks all embarked on public campaigns to “rebrand” themselves. The simple, stable, historic marquees of “quality” of CBS and NBC no longer seemed (to use Brandon Tartikoff’s terms) to bring acceptable numbers of viewers into the network tent.

Of course, branding has been an obligatory marketing staple of corporate business strategies outside of broadcasting for many years, as any MBA student can attest. And while NBC once had the brand identity and loyalty of, say, Coca-Cola, it no longer did by the early 1990s. The lion’s share of critical and public attention for branding was garnered by ABC in its “yellow campaign” starting in 1997. No longer even an issue of typography and logo, ABC simply plastered the color yellow on every promo in print, broadcast, or billboard, along with ironic and knowing tag lines that mocked everything from the moronic tastes of parents (“This is not your father’s TV”) to the exaggerated claims of mental decline (that TV is mind numbing and lowers literacy) and physical decline (programs for couch potatoes) attributed to television by concerned consumer advocates and liberal watchdogs. True postmodern irony might be the well-earned reputation of actual programs on and by MTV, VH1, and SCTV, but even if it did not have comparably hip programs ABC could still front itself as postmodern by making irony and pastiche a part of every institutional and promotional self-reference. In the end, ABC showcased itself by making the network packagers (rather than the production community) the authoring source of irony, and it signaled this new and very visible ever-presence with a branded Pavlovian yellow promotional hue.

While ABC’s yellow campaign scored notoriety and endless news-hits for rebranding—in everything from the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York*

Times to *Entertainment Tonight* and the tabloids—the most extensive onscreen overhaul of a network began in 1994 by NBC in its “NBC-2000” campaign (a campaign that set the standard for the subsequent rebranding at both CBS and ABC). The campaign by NBC involved far more than a specific color and ironic tag lines. The smug confidence of the networks about their initial prowess in the multichannel flow had eroded to the point of crisis by the mid-1990s. With their drastic loss in market share, the three major networks now needed a way to make not just audiences but also industry members aware of the power and benefits that came with the network “family.” The networks were in a state of crisis, with prognostications of demise or merger forming a steady rhetorical flow in the trades. In 1995 and 1996, NBC counterattacked by borrowing President Bush’s much-maligned “thousand points of light” mythos. Research showed that the traditional four-letter station call-letters were simply too complicated for most viewers to remember. The response? Local stations owned by the national network were to drop the “K” and “W” nationally (as in “KNBC, Burbank”), and adopt the NBC plus channel number (“NBC-4, Burbank”) as a simpler designation and common logo. These nationally aired station/network identifications that focused on local affiliate stations, however, show the full extent to which anxiety about the network’s future ruled the corporate enterprise.¹⁸ As the camera scans a graphic map of the country in one set of spots, hundreds of points of light mark the network’s “214 affiliates nationwide, including KJRH-2 Tulsa, Oklahoma.”

This campaign, not illogically, followed soon after the much publicized “abandonment” of CBS by a number of longtime affiliate stations—network-affiliate “traitors” as it were—who opted for the rising fortunes and hipper programming of the newer fourth network, Fox. The celebration and symbolic construction of a network “family” by NBC can thus be seen as a kind of preemptive corporate strike. It was, in essence, industry damage-control aimed at vigorously reasserting the aura of network authority and quality. Not since the 1950s had the networks had to work this hard to teach viewers and stations about the benefits of national network affiliation. These kinds of mediating video texts, then, also function as shorthand corporate reports for anxious affiliate stations who may have considered jumping ship. The top-down model of prestige programming—which includes Hollywood television and network news—always promises to guarantee the welfare of the affiliate family members broadcasting out in the provinces.

The kind of aggressive and heavy-handed damage control evident in these spots came as part of a broader range of marketing “innovations.”

Indeed, NBC had also induced consent on the part of program producers to include the NBC logo “inside” scenes from aired programs themselves. This gambit amounted to a very clever sort of blackmail because program producers for years had complained that license fees from networks were never fair (that is, never paid for the actual cost of program production). These costs were ultimately only covered through later syndication revenues that went directly to the producers’ companies. Here NBC was subtly forcing its partners to erect televised billboards inside episodes that NBC had not fully paid for. Apparently, the long-term financial prospects of NBC were both significant and enough in jeopardy that program providers realized that their fates were ultimately affected by the “health” of the network that first launched them. By eliminating commercial breaks between shows, and by asking for network IDs within diegetic scenes, the network could promise greater viewer carryover from show to show. Program providers could certainly appreciate this tactic—if the networks “hammocked” them between strong, proven shows. But the real lesson of these programming moves lies in the public consciousness of the notion that the fates of program producers, the network, and the affiliate stations were all very much intertwined. Both the network “family-of-stations” ID campaign and the tactic of intradiegetic branding with logos stand as very public ways that television mediates and negotiates changes, even as it mollifies insecurities in the industry.

In a quintessential moment of feigned nonpartisanship, *Today* host Katie Couric announced on the NBC-2000 demo tape that viewers were about to see the network’s most dramatic makeover ever.¹⁹ Visual evidence that something *had* changed in the aesthetic ways that the major networks did business came in the segment that followed, which summarized NBC’s 1994 campaign to overhaul its corporate logo and identity. The makeover also initiated a proliferation of intermediary video forms, all designed to drive home and publicly “manage” the overhaul in the audience’s mind. The marketing machine of NBC simultaneously flooded the programming world with intermediary texts that both legitimized and analyzed their “new” look and “attitude.”

The once staid and venerable NBC “commissioned” cutting-edge artists—what they termed in the NBC-2000 demo tape as the biggest names in design and animation—to draft, engineer, sculpt, and animate the look that expressed its newfound attitude. Mark Malmberg, the computer-artist guru behind the cyberfilm *Lawnmower Man*, fused the network with Grateful Dead electronics. David Daniels—“bad-boy” artist (in the mind of perky host Katie Couric) and A-list director of music videos and claymation spots for Honda—touted his network offering, or what he

called "psychedelic meatloaf in motion." Resurrected 1960s pop-art cast-off Peter Max repeatedly grooved about the "free reign" that enlightened NBC had given him to express himself. Painter Joan Gratz, in turn, stepped forward to render the network's logo monograph on electronic "impressionism."

The darker side of postmodernism came in full force, as well, in the form of J. J. Sedelmaier and John Kricfalusi. Sedelmaier spun his logo from the brain-numbed animated "slacker" aesthetic of *Beavis & Butt-Head*. Kricfalusi, originator of the *Ren & Stimpy* flatulent aesthetic in cartoons, toyed with the interviewer even as he explained to the network audience his vision of the network peacock: "Colorful things come out of his butt." To bring full circle the bad-boy, cutting-edge master code of the corporate makeover, NBC awarded broadcast exhibit to two nonprofessional artists who pushed the envelope with computer graphics cranked out on their Macintosh computers at home. The lesson was clear. The audience was "bad," but the Fortune 100 corporation of NBC was "badder" still. Even as Kricfalusi confessed disingenuously that "I don't know what hip is" (yet another update of Andy Warhol's "I don't care" aesthetic) NBC was showing that it was now in fact the empire of the hip. No self-doubt was even needed. The imperative to rebrand was fueled in great measure by the growing sense that there now was simply not enough of an audience to go around; that is, not enough to share (profitably) with all of the competition. Branding was the first of many tactics that exploited the instability of the televisual form in the age of digital, and it continues to be the central focus as TV.com initiatives compete above the clutter on the Internet.²⁰

Convergent television is also guided by another set of practices: ritualized forms (pitching, writing by committee, executive revolving door). Televisual form has historically been explained in terms of genre, narrative, or modes of reception. I would argue that the social performance of show making—considering TV's creators as industrial actors in an ensemble—must also be considered to fully understand these new forms. Programs on TV are not simply authored "texts," they are also created by "industrial actors" and choreographed through tried-and-proven modes of institutional interaction. The volatility of program forms in the 1990s and after, for example, results in part from the manner in which shows are initiated and developed. With the full-length screenplay as the point of origination for the show/deal now long obsolete, and the detailed prose "treatment" typically used only to sell a producer's optioned idea to a network, producers and screenwriters now rely on the quintessential short-form show starter: the "pitch." Pitching is in many ways a kind of

performance art.²¹ The ability to effectively reduce a thirty- or sixty-minute narrative to two or three short spoken sentences carries a premium in Hollywood. Some swear by visual aids as part of the process; some vouch for the stand-up dramatization mode as a way to nail down the deal. In whatever guise, writers must hook a producer/buyer/executive's attention in a matter of seconds with the promise of something original. If the buyer is enticed, the writer must be prepared to flesh out additional details of the show's structure, logic, and *raison d'être* in an incremental narrative process of question and answer and give and take with the buyer.

But it would be wrong to consider the pitch as a simple temporal devolution of the narrative form from screenplay to treatment to premise. Pitches work by hooking the buyer with a short but recognizable convention of some sort, then glomming, spinning, or aggregating it with some other unconventional element in order to create a "just like X but with Y" variant. One result of this logic of juxtaposition and variation is that story sessions are now defined by excessive cross-genre hybridization. And because both short attention span and retorts of "already done" fill the meeting room during pitch sessions, the effective pitcher must have an arsenal of possible show premises to fall back on. This kind of quantity ratchets up both the speed and extent of cross-genre hybridization. The result, arguably, is that shows now must clearly demonstrate originality to get optioned or green-lighted, and to do so quickly with a rapid "just-like-but-very-different" premise. Another result is that the stylistic outcome of this social ritual means that contemporary TV in the multichannel postnetwork era owes more to André Breton and surrealism than it does to an Aristotelian telos and the classic three-act plot.

In industry lore *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984–1989) stands as the classic example of the pitch-driven show, with creator Michael Mann's two-word pitch used to leverage, launch and update the most stylish of network TV's mid-1980s cable competitors: "MTV cops." Both CBS and critics subsequently pitched the Saturday-morning show *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* (1986–1991) as "*Mister Rogers* on acid," in a way that directly leveraged and then mocked a serious children's program predecessor on PBS. Both examples suggest the extent to which what might be called the "pitch aesthetic" informs TV today, not simply by updating a genre with a new twist but also by positioning the new show over and against a competing network or programming entity. Consider in this regard the wave of denigrating criticism that greeted the implicit pitch and the pitch aesthetic of Fox's reality show *Temptation Island* in 2000–2001: "Take *Survivor* and *Blind Date*, add a dash of *Change of Heart*, top it with a

scoop of *Jerry Springer*, and you've got *Temptation Island*, Fox's hit version of *When Good Spouses Go Bad*." But consider also how such a pitch aesthetic raises the ratings stakes by setting in motion counterpitches and PR spins as well. One rival network executive counterpitched *Temptation Island* in a way intended to hype its own show's alternatives: "It's like Fox swallowed *Survivor* and then crapped it out."²² The hyperhybridization of the pitched show here (which juxtaposes elements of five previous shows), meets an antagonistic counterpitch that reduces the hit to a meager and binary scatological collage.

The industrial performance art of pitching inculcates the production culture with a clockwork-like dependence on endless variation/replication and a process of generic aggregation. This helps explain the wealth of televisual forms across the multichannel spectrum. But another industrial ritual, "writing by committee," stands as a countervailing performance that works to contain the stylistic volatility of the pitch aesthetic. Most showrunners (producer/creators) in U.S. television have backgrounds as writers, and many others broadly deem such producers the true authors of television.²³ It is the showrunner's defining vision of a series, after all, that stamps the series as distinctive. But the sheer magnitude of the narrative universe needed to support a full season of half-hour or hour-long shows in TV (vs. film) means that actual authorship must fall to a team of writers (sometimes a very large team of writers) over a year of production. Without the relatively leisurely pace allowed in feature film production, television writers must crank out thirty- and sixty-minute scripts at a much faster rate, and they usually do this in teams.

The film industry has traditionally denigrated television for "writing by committee" while assuming ownership for themselves of the traditional creative mythos of quality: sole authorship. Yet the very success of the committee-mode in TV has allowed it to invade the world of feature film production as well. In fall 2000 the industry trades and tabloids often told of the behind-the-scenes creative soap opera that led up to the release of *Charlie's Angels*. The press gagged at the thought that literally scores of teamed and successive screenwriters had been enjoined to write, rewrite, and rewrite the script again.²⁴ While executives argued that this form of musical chairs helped "punch-up" the scenes, the moral was not lost on many in the industry. Even features had become excessively formulaic, with writers now only needed to fill in the missing chunks and pieces of the narrative blueprint. The big-budget, big-screen action pic had apparently learned the efficiencies of television's network age. Working (significantly) from a television series original, feature films like

Charlie's Angels dutifully mastered TV's stabilizing mode as part of the adaptation by utilizing the large writing committee.

Writing by committee assumes that a show's main story arcs are well known and established, usually in a written document called the show's "bible." Any necessary backstory is thereby codified to ensure continuity in all future scripts. Screenwriters who build a show and script from a bible end up functioning more like "assemblers" punching in a range of possible options—for the joke, punchline, new character, etc.—from a "menu" of possible (but to some, monotonous) range of choices. The anonymity of writing by committee alarms authors, but the actual practice has the more deadly effect of constraining the original volatility of the pitch aesthetic into a fairly rigid matrix of obligatory structural forms. Any variation allowed or required is simply the joke, line, or character that is punched into the established structural slot. Stylistic volatility encouraged by the pitch meets a second ritualized textual force: the rationality, inertia, and redundancy of the menu-driven writing by committee.

Yet another industrial ritual further dulls the pitch mode's tendency to encourage stylish volatility: television's corporate boardroom game of executive musical chairs. The U.S. television networks typically announce their fall schedules in May. As is regularly the practice, a number of television executive heads roll in the months that follow, and new studio/network chiefs are brought in to clean up the "mess" of those ousted. With their own career moves a concern and with inevitably short tenures to face, the newcomer executives typically let risky shows die on the vine because they will get no credit for the show deals of their predecessors.²⁵ With the most to lose in the increasingly competitive multichannel market, the majors (CBS, NBC, ABC) are particularly susceptible to the conservative inertia and dulling insecurities of the "executive revolving door" ritual. In many cases management changes like these are commonly couched by spokespersons and the trade press in a binary corporate paradigm of courting, marriage, and divorce. Observers—in remarks such as the "honeymoon is over in [the] alliance of Ovitz, Burkle . . . funny how a little thing can drive a wedge into a match made in heaven"²⁶—also reveal the extent to which the industry rationalizes corporate decisions (and exit strategies) in the more emotional language of interpersonal passion and betrayal.

In this ongoing tension between pitch-mode volatility on the one hand, and writing by committee and executive-revolving-door constraints on the other, the newer networks, studios, and upstarts tend to gain the most from the genre-crunching pitch mode. While expensive, star-driven network sitcoms on NBC and ABC encourage generic caution

in the writing committees and executive suites, the less traditional generic tastes of UPN, WB, Fox, and Comedy Central place a premium on pitch-glommed story ideas that promise to rise above the programming clutter. Fox's (cheaply made but sensationalist ride-along video) *Cops* gets repitched as Fox's (cheaply made but sensationalist videotape carnage collage) *World's Scariest Police Chases*, which gets repitched as *When Animals Attack*, which gets repitched as *When Good Spouses Go Bad*. The (cost-effective) shock-TV success of UPN's *WWF Smackdown* gets repitched as the silicone-enhanced-cleavage-with-SI-like-swimsuit-segment-female-hysteria spectacle *Women in Wrestling*, which then gets repitched as the steroid-enhanced-*Gladiator*-with-goalposts-and-raging-testosterone-masculinity of the newly televised XFL football league. In the programming world of the lower-caste networks (UPN, WB, Fox), the pitch-mode spins out new show concepts with clockwork-like regularity.

Redundancy and stylistic inertia intensify as one moves up the programming food chain to the major networks. Manic genre-hybridization and the reliance on pitch-mode autopilot intensify as one moves down the programming food-chain to lowlier network wannabes (UPN, WB, Fox) and first-run syndicators desperately seeking financing for coproductions and off-prime-time cablecasts. Stylistic permutations are not simply matters "determined" causally either by political economies or by the cadre of mainstream network producers and executives who take redundancy with (a little) variation to the bank. Both ends of the network programming spectrum are managed by divergent socio-professional rituals, now codified in the industrial culture. Televisual form is very much lived. It results, in part, from industrial performances and social relations that precede and follow the televised screen event proper.

Stunting (programming form), the final element in my list of institutional practices, now generates many new formal permutations during a given season, especially during "sweeps" periods.²⁷ For many viewers, sweeps weeks are now a recognizable, quarterly part of network programming. By setting aside selected weeks in November, February, and May, networks establish advertising rates for the months that follow based on Nielsen ratings calculated during the sweeps. This is a simple enough concept—a consensual way that corporations agree to rationalize both their economic returns and the very ground rules for competition—but it fails to explain the complicated aesthetic processes that sweeps inevitably set in motion. Called "stunts" by critics and networks alike, special episodes of series are frequently aired to attract a higher-than-representative audience and so "spike" ratings. The intended effect of such spikes is that ad rates are set at an artificially higher level. Although spiking is tech-

nically prohibited (because it makes a mockery of the premise of “level ground” so essential to accurate ratings analysis among competitors), no one, including the Nielsen corporation, is willing or able to explain how narrative and stylistic stunts jeopardize the rationality of the system.

I have elsewhere described how a range of stunts function for the production culture.²⁸ This practice includes a number of what might be termed distinct “stunt genres”: the masquerade, the production stunt, the docu-stunt, the special “making-of” stunt, the migrating “cross-genre” guest-star stunt, and the cross-network or cross-media stunt. First, beginning in the 1980s a number of prime-time shows systematically began to “masquerade” as entirely different shows, series, or films. *Roseanne* (a *Father Knows Best*-esque fifties domestic sitcom), *Moonlighting* (a Valentino silent film and *Casablanca*-esque drama), *thirtysomething* (a *Dick Van Dyke*-esque melodrama), and *Northern Exposure* (a bohemian western) all had special episodes that completely discarded the standard look of their diegetic worlds and “became” some other look and narrative. A second set of elite prime-time shows like *Moonlighting* (film noir cinematography, Toland-esque deep-focus photography, acute dream-state lighting effects), *The X-Files* (cyberpunk, video-gaming graphics, “live” helicopter footage), *Twin Peaks* (Lynchian altered-state tableaux and set design), *Mad about You* (a live one-take episode pitched as an homage to golden-age live drama and a showcase for the series’ award-winning actors who, according to the network, operated “without a net”), *The Drew Carey Show* (music video, *Rocky Horror* stylistics, and choreography in a “musical” episode), and *Freaky Links* (DV-cams, Web sites, downloaded Internet graphics and audio) all used the special episode to stage acutely self-conscious exercises in cinematic production style. For some in the production community, this allowed TV cinematographers, lighting designers, and editors to show off and experiment with cutting-edge looks that standardized genres did not allow and to publicly announce their accomplishment in industry trade convention panels at the NAB convention, SMPTE conferences (Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers), and Showbiz Expo.

Another favored stunting genre emerged in what I have termed the “docu-stunt,” a special episode in which the show becomes a documentary film.²⁹ *M*A*S*H**, *St. Elsewhere*, *China Beach*, and *Mad about You* all slipped into this mode for sweeps. By doing so, such episodes functioned to foreground the superiority of their actors, who typically deprecated and sluffed their way through verité scenes or confided very “private” and offscreen sentiments directly to viewers. Docu-stunts in these series—and in other very popular shows with large fan bases—allowed actor-now-

star-driven ensembles (along with the fans) to muse on the very meaning of the show, but from within a special artificial, diegetic frame that is bracketed off especially for sweeps as “reality.” With this diegetic bracketing-off, the special docu-stunt thereby creates for the series not “self-reflexivity” in a Brechtian or Godardian sense, but a self-conscious mutual reflexivity with the fan base.

The next stunt genre—the “making-of” stunt—breaks entirely with the obligation to even protect the integrity of the show’s diegetic frame (whether fictional or docu-stunt). First-run syndicated hits like *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Hercules* have both broken down any notion of discrete diegesis in stunts by allowing actors to appear as “themselves” rather than their screen personas or characters. In one *Xena* episode the fictional characters debate the narratological choices about appropriate character arcs in the series and then slip in and out of temporal incongruities and series roles. In *Hercules*, the archaic myth figures argue over “merchandizing rights” and publicity billing as they cruise down palm-lined streets in Beverly Hills in full myth-era regalia. This stunt genre fulfills the making-of function by providing in-the-know fans with narrative possibilities far too complicated to stage authentically in production.³⁰ By taking apart the narrative world and reworking it, the studio, in effect, does what Henry Jenkins might call “poaching” and “filking,” terms used to describe the deconstruction and remaking of a show or music by fans.³¹

Finally, two stunt genres work by hyping cross-platform or cross-media incursions in special episodes: the cross-genre guest-star stunt and the cross-network stunt.³² The cross-genre guest star stunt is, of course, among the most common form of stunting, recurrent in series like *Friends* (which, for example, imported *Magnum, P.I.*’s Tom Selleck), *The Simpsons* (which imports practically anyone available in Hollywood’s relative directories), *Family Law* (which imported *Matlock*’s Andy Griffith), and *Dharma and Greg* (which imported *Hercules*’s Kevin Sorbo). While this is arguably the most common and recognized form of sweep stunt, it has evolved from its central and almost obligatory place on the comedy/variety shows of the 1950s³³ and occasional use on sitcoms of the 1950s to frequent and excessive movements in contemporary tv. By having film actress Liz Taylor make guest appearances on each and every successive sitcom show aired on one sweeps evening, the host network used the cross-genre guest-star stunt to program the entire evening as an entity. In some ways, this gambit made explicit a process that Raymond Williams theorized as “flow”—the idea that television is not about the kind of individual program that critics tend to isolate but rather about

the experience of viewing extended, composite sequences comprised of a succession of texts that include ads, breaks, programs, previews, etc.³⁴ The Taylor stunt made clear that the network—not an individual show or its creators—had marshalled the star power necessary for this kind of “event television” across an entire evening.

The related but different “cross-network stunt” is certainly more difficult to understand at first than the various guest-star permutations. NBC’s sitcom *Jenny* stunted in 1998 by cutting back and forth between a staged episode of MTV/Viacom’s *The Real World* and its own *Jenny* digesis. No real fiduciary interest appeared to guide the intertextual play (NBC and Viacom are wholly distinct corporations), but end-titles betrayed to committed viewers that the sitcom was in fact produced by “MTV productions”—a semiautonomous production entity—which did benefit directly from its contractual relationship as a program supplier across platforms and conglomerates. Many critics and audiences similarly took note of the cross-network stunt engineered by David E. Kelley in 1999. Kelley’s hit show *Ally McBeal* had become a flagship leader for Fox Television’s programmers, even as Kelley’s *The Practice* had earned critical acclaim but little viewership in its first season on ABC. Both competing networks—Fox and ABC—jointly staged a cross-network stunt that brought *Ally McBeal* characters into *The Practice*, and *The Practice* characters into *Ally McBeal*. Although the demeanor of the two legal shows could not be more different (*Ally* had won Emmy awards as a “comedy,” while critics regaled *The Practice* as a “serious” ensemble drama), this symbiotic cross-network stunt worked to bring additional viewers to both Fox and ABC. Yet, the symbolic winner was clearly creator/producer David E. Kelley whose “quality” now apparently transcended the proprietary confines of mere network television. With this stunt-derived cultural capital in hand, Kelley went on to land additional deals in following seasons with shows like *Boston Public*, which also cross-stunted with *Ally* during the February sweeps in 2001.

These six recurrent stunt genres all work to do two things. First, they allow the production cadre and the culture that produces TV to come to the foreground on-air (and thus to celebrate and codify their accomplishment in secondary industrial accounts, trades, and professional meetings). Second, the stunts allow members of both the audience and the production culture to articulate, revise, and rearticulate cross-industry relations. In the era of postnetwork instability that defines television in the age of digital, staying immersed inside of a show’s lock-tight diegesis is a luxury, one that many new shows simply cannot afford. To stay afloat ratings-wise, to earn critical distinction, to attract Emmy award nods, and

to secure and enhance the position of a show and its producers in town—these factors mean that backstory, corporate relations, and self-conscious reflections on critical status and aesthetic hierarchy (of stars, the series, the producers, or the network) will continue to stand as viable onscreen story matters as well. Continuing institutional and cultural instabilities make this so. Stunting is, in some ways, congruent with the pitch-mode of program development. Both practices, that is, encourage stylistic hybridization. Production by committee and executive-revolving-door tendencies, by contrast, tend to constrain formal volatility because both practices work to minimize the economic risk that media corporations face when airing unorthodox programming. Yet these historic constraints have not blunted the popularity of stunt-driven, cross-media permutations. In the multichannel age of digital and conglomeration the formal hybridity of cross-corporate stunting and textual inversion has become even more crucial for newcomer networks with less market share.

A number of the formal and institutional practices described above owe their industrial popularity to the effective (post-vaporware) arrival of digital technologies in the work worlds of convergence TV. These formal elaborations and augmentations include: user aggregation as a countermeasure to meta-browsing; data mining as advertising's response to now-meaningless click-through rates; conglomerating TV/dot-com sites as total marketing antidotes to narrowcasting and unruly user surfing in off-air time; and repurposing as a means to counteract a limited first-run shelf life and to exploit legacy archival holdings in the postnetwork era. These new technology-assisted "innovations" have further broken down the fundamental (even if mythical) wall between the advertising and editorial worlds. The National Association of Program Executives (NATPE) now concurs that the thirty- and sixty-second spots are things of the past, replaced by comprehensive new product placement strategies and programs coproduced by Madison Avenue agencies and their multinational corporate clients like Coca-Cola. Advertising executive Bob Kuperman justifies the loss of the earlier working distinctions and argues that formal permutations will continue: in a panel at the annual NATPE convention titled "When the Advertiser Turns Producer," he claimed that "what we now call interruptive messaging (in advertising), is probably going to be the least efficient way to build a relationship with consumers. In the future, you probably won't know where the commercial stops and the programs begin."³⁵

Formal and textual changes in television cannot be viewed as "caused" or "determined" by the technological transition to digital. Rather, what I have referred to as "convergence TV" can be seen, to use Raymond

Williams's term, as "symptomatic"³⁶ of more fundamental logics and practices in the history of television: syndication, repurposing, branded programming, and conglomeration. That is, digital technologies (and the six types of technologically enabled "textual augmentations" on TV/dot-com sites outlined earlier in the chapter) merely served to accelerate and legitimate these well-practiced industrial strategies. Branding, pitching, and stunting all predated as well as survived and prospered in television's transition to digital. For this reason, they must be seen as more than pre- or protodigital practices that prefigured convergence TV in an art historical sense. Such institutional practices have, in fact, come into their own in the age of convergence television, and are widely deployed in ways that author and inflect digital/televisual forms. TV/dot-com convergence merely provided the technological, economic, and conceptual conditions that allowed branding, syndication, repurposing, and conglomeration to emerge not just as corporate strategies but as viable textual and stylistic practices as well.

FORMS OF DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE IN THE AGE OF CONGLOMERATION

Short-form histories of the rise and fall of network television go something like this: a government-sanctioned and regulated oligopoly in network television in the 1960s and 1970s guaranteed the NBC, CBS, and ABC corporations control of well over ninety percent of the television audience. The advent of new programming and delivery systems in the 1980s—cable, DBS, pay-per-view, and the VCR and remote—broke this oligopoly and opened American television screens to many more emerging companies. HBO, CNN, MTV, VH1, the Discovery Channel, Cinemax, USA Network, BET, Nickelodeon, American Movie Classics, Lifetime, the Sci-Fi Network, Bravo, ESPN, Fox Sports Net, the History Channel, Home and Garden Television, and many other networks and channels were proof positive that the mass audience had indeed been splintered into niches. Such a splintering and proliferation of networks and channels ostensibly broke down the top-down control of American broadcasting in a way that publicly favored the diverse tastes and heterogeneous identities of the American public. This climate of increased diversification suggested to fiscal conservatives what had long been a mantra of the television industry and the NAB: a free market, not regulation, was the only way to ensure diversity of programming. As a result of this shift (starting in the Reagan/Bush era but continuing through the next two administrations), government regulation effectively dissipated as the

Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the FCC pulled back in order to let the telecommunications industry and entertainment market work their democratic wonders. Across a broad spectrum of interests, diversity in channel choices was optimistically conflated with cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity per se. The 1934 Radio Act and the 1946 FCC Blue Book's requirements that television must implement measures to guarantee the representation of minority viewpoints, the needs of local communities, and the importance of culturally challenging, noncommercial programming now stood like no-longer-needed archaic remnants of an earlier, less-open era. In contrast to the regulated public service strictures of the earlier era, the open market touted by contemporary television, along with the intensive capitalization deployed by the newer networks and start-ups, would now fulfill the earlier regulatory mandates, even as they made proprietary corporate owners wealthy. The postnetwork era, that is, was to be a "win-win" situation for all concerned—for industry as well as for multicultural diversity.

Yet few looked past the hype to challenge a subsequent trend. After the multichannel market model rose to prominence and regulatory policy withered, merger mania caught up with those in the expanding cable TV entertainment industries. Sony bought Paramount, who owned the *Star Trek* franchise, which then fueled the launch of UPN, which subsequently lost its Chris-Craft/UPN affiliate station group in a sale to Rupert Murdoch and News Corp., which (ironically) owned and bankrolled UPN's competitor, the Fox Network. Viacom, once a lowly syndication company in the 1950s but now corporate head of MTV, Nickelodeon, and VH1, also had ties to Paramount but took control of venerable broadcaster CBS in 2001. Capital Cities sold ABC to Disney, which further diversified the company by developing ESPN1, ESPN2, and ESPN Classic Sports, the California Angels, and Go.com. Time Warner was merged with CNN, which included the Sports Illustrated programming and print franchise and the massive feature and prime-time production arm of Warner Bros., which developed and fed the nationwide delivery system Time Warner Cable—together creating a massive entertainment conglomerate which successfully realized the mother of all mergers: the AOL Time Warner conglomeration of 2000. While some hand-wringing greeted the implications of a renewed form of "vertical integration" long absent since the 1949 Paramount decrees (where a single corporation was prohibited from owning and controlling each stage of the media cycle—from production, to distribution, to exhibition and broadcast), the new mega-conglomerates like AOL Time Warner reestablished and legitimized vertical integration with a vengeance. And they did so with the blessing of the

very same government that had, in the name of public interest, aggressively abolished vertical integration five decades earlier.³⁷ Why and how did this happen?

In a few short years, a 90-plus share, three-network oligopoly fell to scores of new electronic media competitors promising program diversity. But this diverse pantheon was then reaggregated again into four giant multinational media corporations, which together by fall 2000 had regained and amassed 86 percent of the audience. The present, widespread sanction given entertainment mergers and reglomeration stems from the fact that these new vertically reintegrated conglomerates have symbolically mastered the very regime of diversity, public service, and democratic taste that regulatory limits were set in place to preserve for the past half century. However, rather than dispersing taste niches and community viewpoints across competing channels, the new conglomerates have mastered the ability to include this diverse pantheon of tastes and perspectives *within* components or "tiers" of the very same conglomerate. Viacom can thereby prove that it meets the needs of the youthful MTV/VH1 demographic, the African American target audience of BET, as well as the mainstream and older demographic tastes of CBS. Viacom proves to its shareholders and to Washington that it is both profitably diverse and inclusive, even as the television industry champions its market-driven diversity.

A recent case underscores the importance of this kind of institutional posture. When the NAACP and others mounted a frontal attack against the networks in 1999 based on the lack of racial diversity in prime-time television, the networks and studios jumped anxiously to "blacken" or "color" many of their existing series and staffs. A subsequent analysis of network programming, however, revealed that prime-time actually represented a higher percentage of blacks than existed in the population as a whole. Yet critics pointed out that this self-congratulatory notion of adequate representational percentages masked a countervailing trend: television had resegregated itself by the very tiering andglomeration that the new multichannel landscape had legitimized. Yes, images of color existed, but not on the still-very-white worlds of NBC, CBS, and ABC programming, where they were almost nonexistent. African Americans were, however, ever present on the newer networks of WB and UPN, which had adopted the proven start-up strategy that fourth network Fox had exploited so successfully in the late 1980s: both made extensive use of "black-block" programming to reach a young and hip multiracial demographic that the majors no longer needed. Yes, television was diverse, but many critics pointed out that the diversity was based on a caste system of

genre and tiering.³⁸ African Americans, that is, are diverted to the endless ethnic comedies and reality shows so prevalent on UPN, WB, and Fox. Diversity of representation now exists in television, but only because of generic and format “ghettoizations” that the multichannel conglomerates have established and profited from.

Because of this practice the “industry” now regularly deflects criticisms about its lack of public service and diversity by noting that the industry as a whole takes care of providing access to a wide range of groups and perspectives. They seldom point out two factors, however: first, that this ghettoization allows the majors (CBS, ABC, NBC) to be no less appreciably white than they’ve been for two decades (and to be that way without regulatory pressure); and second, that the new conglomerates actually prosper by internalizing and mastering a regime of difference in the form of corporate affiliate tiering. Thus, the *de facto* goal of each new conglomerate is to have within the walls of its extended corporate family a programming niche for every taste culture and social identity. Diversity and multiculturalism are now far from abnormal for the industry. While corporate components (specific networks and studios) may become more specialized and homogenous in scope and identity, the larger conglomerates that they comprise today must be tiered and affiliated as multicultural aggregates. This kind of industrial, multicultural aggregation deflects both claims of racism and concerned calls for new regulatory measures to enforce public service, diversity, and democratic representation. The entertainment industries have every reason to internalize and master such ideals: they have done so in practice by instituting multicultural tiering as part of a global, mediated economy of scale.

I began this essay by suggesting that a range of fundamental transformations in industry, economy, and technology have fueled greater volatility and permutation in televisual form. The overdetermined public construction and perpetuation of digital “convergence” as the needed and inevitable outcome of much industrial and cultural activity does two things in this regard: it defines industrial and aesthetic changes in mostly technological terms, even as it conflates and conceals in technology a very different and macroscopic form of convergence—corporate conglomeration and vertical reintegration. The trades hype the wonders of digital multiplexing, high definition, and dot-com start-ups, but the subtext of such hype really concerns new kinds of corporate alignment. Repurposing, content migration, branding, stunting, and conglomerate/multicultural tiering all provide effective, tactical countermeasures in the face of very real anxieties about runaway production, new technologies, and

volatile market conditions. Textual practices of aggregation and permutation fit the needs of a post-Fordist industry tied not to standardization and redundancy but to the effective production of flexible semiotic and cultural capital—now requisite industrial competencies in the age of digital.

Declarations of television's imminent demise in the 1990s in the face of the Internet and digital media were greatly exaggerated, including *Wired's* taunting, precrash cover story about NBC president Bob Wright: "Go ahead, kill your TV. NBC is ready."³⁹ Such claims were also inevitably offered from some precarious corporate vantage point of vested interest within the high-tech and dot-com euphoria that preceded NASDAQ's precipitous high-tech collapse in spring 2000. A range of institutional players attempting to manage and make sense of the "inevitable" shift to digital—both industrial (the computer and entertainment industries and Hollywood and the film industry) and academic (cultural theory and film studies)—all failed to recognize one persistent and nagging bridge between old media and new media: television. As current initiatives in entertainment and e-commerce show, television brought to the table of technological "revolution" a set of principles that proved to ground the Internet as well: television is electronic, ubiquitous, round the clock, and ostensibly (like the Net) "free." Television, unlike most dot-coms, has also had at its disposal vast amounts of the very material that some argued was the key to maintaining a permanent server-based Net presence in the age of broadband.⁴⁰ Tom Rogers, president of NBC Cable and Internet Operations, calms the fears of his anxious shareholders with this very confidence about the network's holdings and deep-storage: "In broadband, you need lots of video material, and it's extremely difficult, if not impossible, to create a rich video library, if you are not already in the business."⁴¹

The genius of television's persistence as the dominant art form of the second half of the twentieth century was its ability to produce and exploit a set of quantitative and qualitative economic conditions that in turn fueled two fundamental components in the production of a networked, globalized culture: First, the creation of branded entertainment content marked by distinction (through the consolidation and intensification of capital in the entertainment industries); and second, the perpetuation and maintenance of a vast and reliable system of consumerism and global merchandizing. Advertising and commercialism proved to be the keys that linked the efficiencies of capital-intensive content creation (in Hollywood and network television) with the economies of scale required by broadcasting, cablecasting, and satellite distribution. As a nexus be-

tween these two worlds, digitalization provided optimal conditions under which a range of existing institutional strategies and new formal permutations could be effectively and profitably deployed.

NOTES

A portion of this chapter was adapted from my essay "Branding" in *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2nd ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (Chicago: Fitzroy-Dearborn Press, 2004).

1. Chris Peacock, "Are You Being Metabrowsed?" *Inside*, December 12, 2000, p. 103.
2. See Horace Newcomb, *TV: The Most Popular Art* (New York: Anchor, 1974); Stuart Kaminsky, *American Television Genres* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1985); and David Marc, *Demographic Vistas: Television in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).
3. See Beverle Houston, "Viewing Television: The Meta-Psychology of Endless Consumption," *Quarterly Review of Film* 9.3 (1984): 183-95; and Sandy Flitterman, "Psychoanalysis, Film, and Television," in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Robert C. Allen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 203-46.
4. See Allen, *Channels of Discourse*; and Ellen Seiter, "Semiotics and Television," in Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse*, 31-66.
5. See Sarah Kozloff, "Narrative Form and Television," in Allen, *Channels of Discourse*, 67-100; and Jane Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form, and Television Today," in *The Media Reader*, ed. Manuel Alvarado and John O. Thompson (London: British Film Institute, 1990), pp. 253-64.
6. See Horace Newcomb and Robert S. Alley, eds., *The Producer's Medium: Conversations with Creators of American TV* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Nick Browne, "The Political Economy of the Television (Super) Text," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9.3 (1984): 174-82; Robert Vianello, "The Power Politics of Live Television," *Journal of Film and Video* 37 (1984): 26-40; and William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).
7. See Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for "Blackness"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Julie D'Acci, *Designing Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); John T. Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995); and Jostein Gripsrud, *The Dynasty Years* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
8. Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
9. The nature of the forms used to work through change and negotiate instability is evident in a variety of socio-professional registers, including the public relations tactics used to integrate the two technical cultures (old media and new media) at markets, conventions, and film festivals: for example, "AtomFilm's Winnebago-mounted, traffic-snarling screening room was one of the most visible symbols of the dot-com

invasion" (John Healy, "Humbled Dot-Coms Still Major Presence at Sundance," *Los Angeles Times*, January 22, 2001, p. C1). This case showed how dot-com start-ups worked hard to define themselves as both "cinematic" and "independent" at the Sundance festival. These poses informed their online Web design as well, and spoke to potential "old media" affiliates in a symbolic language they well understood and associated with the festival.

10. Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York: Knopf, 1994).

11. John T. Caldwell, "Hybridity on the Media Superhighway: Techno-Futurism and Historical Agency," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 16.1 (1995): 103-111; Caldwell, *Televisuality*; and John T. Caldwell, "Slipping and Programming Televisual Liveness," *Aura: Film Studies Journal* 6.1 (2000): 44-61.

12. Kyle Pope and Scott Collins, "The New Killer App," *Inside*, December 12, 2001, p. 64.

13. Joe Schlosser, "Affils to UPN: Don't Tread on Me," *Broadcasting and Cable*, January 29, 2001, p. 30.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

15. Caldwell, *Televisuality*, pp. 297-301.

16. The trades described the new tactics of Jim Moloshok, president of Warner Bros. Online: "Entertainment companies at first saw the Internet as a promotional tool and used it by giving away their content for free. They are now trying to recapture their brands, their business and their future from the new media companies that at first moved faster and smarter" (Michael A. Hiltzik, "Net Effect: Old Media, New Tech," *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1999, p. 14).

17. Caldwell, *Televisuality*, pp. 258-62.

18. It is important to note the distinction between the treatment given to local stations "owned" by network NBC and that given to local "affiliated" stations. The owned stations (such as NBC-4, Burbank) are centered in large cosmopolitan areas, produce significant revenue streams, and were overhauled with explicit changes in name and ID; the affiliates, whose local owners contract to buy and air network offerings (such as KJRH-2), were "wooded" by the network's celebration of a de facto corporate "family."

19. Since the 1950s NBC had started the network programming day with the two-hour talk/news show, *Today*, which was essentially a combination of soft news, happy talk, and short features aimed at the early risers and breakfast viewers of middle America. *Today* was certainly never pitched to the public by programmers as a venue for cutting-edge risk taking.

20. The imperative to brand and rebrand circulates globally as well, as when James Murdoch, CEO of Star TV, with a third of a billion viewers in fifty-three countries, announced that they had revamped their television brand by deleting any explicit reference to TV: "Star TV . . . will be known as STAR, thereby evolving from a television brand to a multi-service, multi-platform brand" (Nyay Bushan, "Star TV Rebrands as STAR," *Hollywood Reporter*, February 2001, pp. A6-12, 65).

21. Consider in this regard the metaphors used to describe this process as an intimate stage that allows screenwriters to spin out story-concept "decorations": "But if Stacey Snider (Universal Pictures chairman) is underwhelmed by pitch, she doesn't show it.

Her job, she explains, is to keep the architecture of the film intact. It's up to the screenwriters to decorate the room" (Patrick Goldstein, "Empire Builders: They Greenlight Big Budget Features and Produce Niche Films. They Schmooze with Julia Roberts and Market the Rugrats. And They're Changing the Course of Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, March 26, 2000, p. 18.

22. Clarissa Cruz, "Havin' a Cheat Wave," *Entertainment Weekly*, January 2001, p. 8.

23. Newcomb and Alley, *Producer's Medium*.

24. Consider the following rather characteristic description of the writing-committee hell that came to be known as *Charlie's Angels*: "But the Murray-Liu screaming matches were only red flag number #1 for *Charlie's Angels*. Red flag #2 was the pink, yellow, and green pages of new scripts that tumbled out of the copying machine daily; [scripts that] bore the names of at least ten writers" (Aljean Harnetz, "They're Rumors, Not Predictions," *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 2000, p. 87).

25. Brian Lowry, "Innovation Suffers in TV Shuffle," *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 1998, pp. F1, F8-9.

26. Michael A. Hiltzik, "Honeymoon Is Over in Alliance of Ovitz, Burkle," *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 2000, p. C1.

27. I am particularly interested in how sweeps and stunting might function in the discourses and practices of the production community, although sweeps are typically seen as a marketing/audience dynamic. Media theorists have latched onto anthropologist Victor Turner's theory of "liminality" as a way of explaining the special-event status of live spectacle programming for the culture of a nation. Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) see the national televised ceremonial events as a liminal space bracketed off from everyday conceptions of time, a symbolic site and event where a people-group can act out alternative identities in imaginative rituals that give culture its meanings. Anthropologists following Turner could find the liminal in things like Mardi Gras or a Papuan sing-sing, and theorists like Dayan and Katz placed it in the macroscopic terms of live broadcasting at the national level. Neither, however, considered how liminality might serve to explain community rituals and events in the cultures of media production.

28. Caldwell, *Televisuality*, pp. 88-92.

29. John T. Caldwell, "Primetime Fiction Theorizes the Docu-Real," in *Reality Squared: Televisual Discourse on the Real*, ed. James Friedman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 259-92.

30. Caldwell, "Slipping and Programming Televisual Liveness," 44-61.

31. Henry Jenkins, "Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture" (New York: Routledge, 1992).

32. Sometimes these cross-entity stunts work within media entities of the same conglomerate, as when David Hannah, president of UPN's affiliate board of governors, considered the merits of airing shows produced by its corporate partners: "We appreciate the network's efforts to stunt those shows to up the viewership, and ultimately [we] are quite excited to be able to cross-promote when it's appropriate" (Schlosser, "Affils to UPN," p. 30.). While it is easy enough to explain the economic logic of this sort of internal stunting, cross-corporation stunting is more difficult to account for.

33. Denise Mann, "The Spectacularization of Everyday Life: Recycling Hollywood Stars and Fans in Early Television," in *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 41–69.
34. Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken, 1974). The Taylor stunt also evokes Browne's notion of the television "super-text"—an extensive text comprised of many programs sequenced by broadcasters according to the logic of "day-parts" (primetime, daytime, near primetime) and targeted demographics.
35. Kuperman, quoted in Joe Schlosser, "Plugging in the tv," *Broadcasting and Cable*, January 29, 2001, p. 34.
36. See Williams, "The Technology and the Society," in *Electronic Media and Technoculture*, ed. John Caldwell (Rutgers University Press, 2000), p. 38.
37. In some cases, the individual components of the new conglomeration evidenced more hand-wringing about the effects of conglomeration than the government. The report that "UPN Executives predicted Friday that their network will continue to operate despite Viacom's new ownership of both CBS and UPN and News Corp.'s (parent of the Fox network) pending purchase of UPN's Chris-Craft-owned affiliate stations" demonstrated how precarious the ownership of content had become and how important it had become to "mark one's turf" in order to maintain one's "brand" in the confusion of conglomeration (Valerie Kuklenski, "UPN Brass See No Course Change Despite New Ownership," *Long Beach Press Telegram*, January 9, 2001, p. c6).
38. I thank Herman Gray for sharing his insights with me on "Black block" programming as a strategy of the new conglomerates. See Herman S. Gray, "Television and the Politics of Difference," in *Cultural Moves* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).
39. NBC's boast (or threat) is quoted in Randell Rothenberg, "Go Ahead, Kill Your Television. NBC is Ready," *Wired* 6:12 (December 6–12, 1998).
40. Caldwell, "Hybridity on the Media Superhighway."
41. Hiltzik, "Net Effect," p. 14.