EDITORIAL

Television A-Z
Toby Miller

What do we think of when we see the word television? It stands for so many things, in so many contexts, for so many different people that the answer to that question could itself cover a dozen books. A short list might include fun, boredom, public service, profit, sport, action, news, men, the United States, movies, color, disaster, poisonous fumes and parts, and sweated manufacture. In fact, I have my own television A to Z list:

Advertising: Texts that interrupt television, or are the best television, or enable television.
Broadcasting: When television went through the air and was aimed at everyone.
Culture: What television was not. Not.
Drama: Once characterized television, and has always characterized its internal workings and debates about it.
Effects: Measuring the impact of worrying about television on politicians, family power dynamics, and the careers of psychology and communication professors.
Flow: The movement of Raymond Williams backwards, forwards, and sideways on a trans-Atlantic liner.
Government: The space between television as a vast wasteland and a toaster with pictures.
Hegemony: How television forms consent. Of course, this is not functionalist. Not a bit.
Ideology: What people who live outside plutocracies and militarized states no longer believe in.
Journalism: Extinct species, formerly common in the United States.
Knowledge: Used to disagree with people who refer to an information society.
Liveness: Plausible, in the case of sports coverage.
Media: Subject for corralling undergraduates and teaching them that what they enjoy is also good for them.
Ownership: A topic that used to matter but is no longer important because people in villages apparently interpret television programs in accordance with their local rituals.

Production: Invisible other than as what media studies undergraduates must do rather than their essays.

Quality: It’s not quality, it’s television.

Race: A Grand Prix.

Sex: Only on satellite and cable.

Technology: Sold to public by offering sport exclusively on latest innovation.

Uses and Gratifications: Jeremy Bentham watching Survivor.

Violence: To be derided, other than when done by the state to foreigners.

Women: A market segment.

X-cess: Media studies academics writing about wrestling or their children.

Youth: Spectators learning how to be responsible consumers.

Zworykin: Fabled television inventor from RCA who “liberated” an already patented invention.