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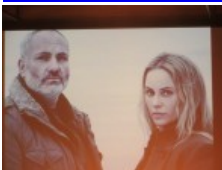
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Every now and then, I get the proverbial swarm flying around my headgear as people announce, predict, or incarnate the end of television. This generally takes the form of remarks such as ‘My children don’t watch television,’ ‘Nobody I know does it,’ or ‘Kids today aren’t interested.’ From music to politics, television’s day is supposedly over.

This isn’t only true of everyday talk, of course. We are forced to encounter it in scholarly, popular, and *bourgeois* media alike on an almost diurnal basis. A recent example, which extrapolates from one person’s decisions to pronounce an entire cultural shift, is representative of a bizarre punditry [that cannot stop itself despite almost two decades of saying the same, wrong, thing](#). Immodest and empirically incorrect—but never let the facts get in the way of narcissism by spoiling a good rant.

My inner truck driver meets my inner Wittgenstein at such moments, as per [when I am told that the internet matters in public views of politics](#).

But I’m always ready for these claims to be proven correct. As soon as they are, I’ll merrily endorse them.

Let’s examine some numbers. Thanksgiving, a truly unholy holiday, sees US residents in the hundreds of millions watching an average of 15 hours of television per person—at least, that was the figure for the last T-word, in November 2013. The Macy’s Day Parade, which commences at 9 am eastern, has seen figures on the increase since 2001. [Nineteen million hung in there last year to watch the dog show that followed NBC’s official coverage](#).

Just weeks after that always awful day, the Consumer Electronics Show ushered in the new year. For all its cult of newness and touching dependency on built-in obsolescence, the Las Vegas convention acknowledged, yet again, that as far as advertisers are concerned, television remains the holy grail. It sells things. It moves people, which means it moves product. Even digital specialists amongst marketers faced the truth—people keep watching television, on a set, at home, with other people, based on the schedule constricted by networks. Ad agencies recognize that college students are promiscuous viewers, but there’s nothing new in that. As always, as thirty years ago, once they graduate and get jobs, they subscribe to satellite or cable. [They don’t cut cords: they order them](#). This isn’t just about finding TV ‘OK.’ [People like it more than they used to](#).

[Worldwide, subscriptions to television via satellite and cable increased 8% to 800 million in 2012](#). As for Britain, ‘[i]n 2013, the average UK viewer watched three hours and 52 minutes of linear television a day on a TV set, and just three minutes and 30 seconds on other devices such as tablets, smartphones and laptops. Viewing on devices other than TVs of video on demand services like ITV Player, Sky Go and the BBC iPlayer accounted for just 1.5% of overall TV consumption. That was up from 1.2% in 2012, but it is still a minority pursuit.’ [People with digital video recorders barely used them](#)’.

For their part, Indian residents are likelier to own TV sets than have access to indoor plumbing, and politicians devote their advertising money to television ahead of all other options, drawing on its confessional qualities via close-ups and generic religiosity to appeal to voters in a non-secular, highly personalized, way (Arvind Rajagopal, “India’s Televisual Populism,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, forthcoming). [The number of Indian TV households grew by 11 million in 2012. In Mexico, as digital media proliferate, so does TV—always, if anything increasingly, the dominant medium](#). And in Australia, even a study that seems intent on demanding that multiple screens are the reality (almost bringing them into being through the will of desire) lies down in a post-orgasmic froth of exhaustion and admits that ‘[all age groups continue to spend the majority of their screen time with the in-home TV set](#)’. Thanks for sharing and I trust you got paid for discovering that.



There simply isn't evidence that new technologies have displaced or are displacing the traditional cultural *bodega* of the last half-century. For example, owners of tablets such as iPads are the keenest consumers of television news worldwide. Their tablets are adjuncts, gadgetary partners, to the main source. Tablets stimulate people to increase their television watching. TV remains the dominant source of truth and object of consumption, in dual senses—the sets cost more, and we spend more time with them than other devices. In the US, TV rules the roost by a long, long distance when it comes to people seeking news.

So my apologies for another rant in an occasional series. I just want to ensure that the entirely mad prognostications by innumerate pundits who magically 'know' things are not allowed to percolate and circulate as if they were credible knowledge as opposed to credulous cyberbarianism.

To repeat, once these incantations refer to something real, I'll willingly sign up as a mild-mannered chorine. For now, I remain where I've been for a decade and a half. Waiting for today's magic to relate to today's science.

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Comments:

1. Sunday

2014-03-07 10:05:41

Interesting article. Usually when I say 'Television is dead' it is because there is absolute nothing on that interests me. I find myself rewatching M*A*S*H or The Avengers most days - not saying there are not good programmes out there currently on, just saying they rarely hold interest to me. I would really just rewatch The Prisoner than Game of Thrones, and the jokes on How I Met Your mother are the exact same jokes from TV shows 50 years ago, just a little more tired because they've been replayed on so many shows. Do I still spend a lot of time watching TV? Yes, especially for work. But what's playing on there most of the time is a show that ended at least 15 years ago.

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