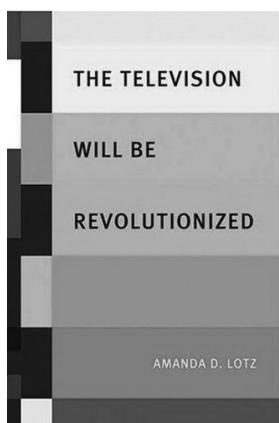


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Book Review: Amanda D. Lotz,

The Television Will Be Revolutionized

NYU Press, 2007



In recent years, Amanda D. Lotz has written prolifically on a variety of aspects of television, including textual analyses of television programs such as *Ally McBeal* and *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*, feminist assessments of qualitative audience research, and explorations of competitive economic practices in the post-

network era. Her most current work, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, offers a detailed look at the substantial changes that the medium has undergone during the past two decades in terms of technological advances, industrial practices, business norms, and audience uses.

In the introduction, Lotz calls into question our understanding and undifferentiated usage of the very term “television.” Rather than seeing television’s rise as following a constant arc of ascension, albeit with some minor modifications over time (e.g. the transition from black-and-white to color TV), Lotz’s main argument is that television has undergone such revolutionary changes that the term today refers to an entirely different medium of mass communication as opposed to the one that existed during Marshall McLuhan’s days, or even during the 1970s.

Lotz discerns three distinct eras in the ruptured history of television:

1. the “network era,” which spanned roughly

from the early 1950s to the early 1980s and was characterized by the adaptation of radio-network modes of content creation, distribution, advertising, and audience measurement to the context of the then-new televisual medium;

2. the era of “multi-channel transition” ushered in by the confluence of the VCR, the remote control, as well as an assortment of cable broadcast technologies and practices between the mid-1980s and the late-1990s; and finally,

3. the “post-network era” which is defined by the digitization of media content and the resulting convergence of computer and televisual innovations. Television in this era is driven by innovations such as handheld video devices (iPod, PSP2, cell phones), video-on-demand devices (TiVo, DVRs), as well as webstreaming and amateur video self-publishing (YouTube, MySpace video embed) technologies within the context of the nascent Web 2.0 environment.

While, with each of these transitions, television has expanded its reach and has saturated ever-increasing aspects of daily life in the United States, it simultaneously has experienced a significant erosion of its erstwhile function as “the cultural hearth around which a society shares media.” The shared, unifying viewing experience of television broadcasting — a push medium during the network era — has given way to narrowcasting and niche-market programs that are emblematic of television

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as a pull-medium in the post-network era. Lotz quotes FOX President Gail Berman and CBS Television President Les Moonves, both of whom pronounced “the end of television as we know it” in 2003, to underscore her main argument that these changes in television during the post-network era are not evolutionary, but rather revolutionary and permanently defining.

Lotz lays out her thesis in greater detail in “Understanding Television at the Beginning of the Post-Network Era,” the opening chapter. She assesses the significance of post-network television as an enduring institution in contemporary American culture by situating it as an electronic public sphere that operates chiefly as a subcultural forum. Video self-publishing in particular, while capable of functioning as a window into other worlds, tends to function as a self-determined gated community, where “self-created television becomes a way of viewers to communicate with established peers, creating specialized viewing communities.”

In the chapters that follow, Lotz focuses on particular content production components that define television in the post-network era. She examines technological trends, changes in content creation and distribution, advertising, and audience measurement. A seventh chapter, entitled “Television Storytelling Possibilities at the Beginning of the Post-Network Era” contains case studies of five television programs which Lotz selected for “the lessons these shows provide about the industry’s changes.” Analyses of ratings successes like HBO’s *Sex and the City*, FX Network’s *The Shield*, and CBS’s *Survivor* stand side-by-side with the critically acclaimed but ratings underperformer *Arrested Development* on FOX and the arguably obscure *Off to War* documentary series, produced by the Japanese broadcasting network

NHK in conjunction with the Discovery Times channel. In her conclusion, Lotz returns to a more theoretical discussion of the post-network television era and postulates the “Five Cs” as its defining elements: choice, control, convenience, customization, and community which combine to allow contemporary viewers to have their preferred television experience.

Those readers who have grown up in the network era and who have perceived — slowly, over the years, and first-hand — some of the changes that Lotz articulates in her book, will still be astonished at the vastness of the shift to the post-network era as she defines it. For those who have lived largely amid these transformational trends, her book will be a welcome scholarly confirmation of the ever-shifting adaptations they have observed and experienced in the televisual landscape.

Lotz’s book is extraordinary in its scope, depth, and readability. The author writes from the anthropological perspective of a participant observer and very adeptly manages to maintain critical distance while reassuring the reader that she, too, is a viewer who takes pleasure in watching television. Throughout, the research that supports this volume is comprehensive and exceptionally current, with some final edits taking into account developments as recent as 2007. Lotz’s writing style is as facile and engaging in its descriptive elements as it is precise in the book’s theoretical and analytical passages.

The Television Will Be Revolutionized lends itself to being chosen as a class text in media studies courses and should be required reading for those seeking to understand more fully the complexity and shifting dynamics in contemporary media culture.

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Notes

1. Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: NYU Press, 2007) 5.
2. Ibid., 19.
3. Ibid., 44.
4. Ibid., 215.
5. Ibid., 245 ff.