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Commodification, viewership and a for-anyone-as-someone "special" structure.

ABSTRACT

Paddy Scannell's analysis of broadcasting as a 'for-anyone-as-someone structure' (2000: 5) remains a key theoretical delineation of the role radio, television (and, now, digital media) play in everyday life. In essence, the development and deployment of the 'for-anyone-as-someone structure' allowed the speech patterns of broadcasting to gain and retain relevance to individual listeners and viewers within a mass context. As recent research has demonstrated (Ekstrom et al 2013), Scannell's model remains relevant to contemporary mediascapes, particularly in relation to formats, like news, where broadcasting "speaks" directly to listeners and viewers. There is, however, another level on which broadcasting speaks its listeners and viewers – the wider, systemic level set by the rules, standards and norms within which individual networks, stations, and people "make" broadcasting happen. From this perspective, one can note that Scannell developed his model within the British context where commercial messages, where they are present, are relatively limited in reach and scope by regulation and professional practice. This paper will argue that a different category of listener and viewer exists within highly commercialised media environments like New Zealand's – the commodified listener / viewer, who is spoken to by her broadcasting system as "someone special".

KEYWORDS

Care structure

For-anyone-as-someone

Commercial television

Promotional culture

SCANNELL'S FOR-ANYONE-AS-SOMEONE STRUCTURE

It is not my purpose to provide a thorough reading of Paddy Scannell's scholarship regarding phenomenology, care structures and the for-anyone-as-someone structure. From his earliest writing on the broad topic Scannell (1995) demonstrated an interest in the way in which

studying broadcasting as a system in its own right requires a phenomenological approach – that it be understood in the first instance as what it is and what it does. Five years later he published the idea of the now famous three "structures": the for-anyone structure (e.g. a toaster); the for-someone structure (e.g. Michael Schumacher's Formula One car); and the for-anyone-as-someone structure (e.g. radio and television) (Scannell 2000). What he is drawing on in making this contradistinction is the idea of a "care structure" (Scannell 2000, 2014), a communicative mode that is based on, and creates, a certain type of audience member:

> I find, when I turn on the news, that I am spoken to while knowing that millions of others are watching at the same time and seeing and hearing exactly the same things. In each case the experience is the same. In each case it is 'for me'. (Scannell 2014: 33)

This structuring of audience as inhabiting two states at once – knowing a broadcast is for all yet experiencing it personally – most obviously relates to live television. This is obvious for two reasons. First, live broadcasting was historically the first mode of communication to develop, so the patterns of production established there would be expected to form the foundation of future television. Second, live broadcasting retains an ethical and moral dimension often absent from non-live television (Dayan 2001, Durham Peters 2001, Durham Peters 2010). Scannell (2001a, 2001b, 2005) engaged with these ideas through a series of articles that increased the focus on the mediated construction concomitant on the transmission of "live".

The idea of the for-anyone-as-someone-structure has underpinned several studies since its publication. David Ryfe (2001) applied several of the early ideas from the effect of FDR's fireside chats to the way the media audience developed into a mediated public. Three years later Clive Barnett (2004) showed how these same ideas could be deliberately applied to the development of new programmes. Slavo Splichal (2006: 706) mobilized Scannell's ideas to show how traditional analyses of the role and function of the public sphere are limited. He argues that the for-anyone-as-someone structure "expresses and embodies that which is in between the impersonal third person and the personal first person, namely the second person (the me-and-you)."

That same year Paul Frosh (2006) drew on Scannell's, work to examine the role of the broadcast audience as witnesses to the lives of strangers. For Frosh, the combination of the personal and the impersonal is the basis of the for-anyone-as-someone structure. He goes

further to argue that the "structure is a prerequisite of all modern public discourse" (2006: 278). Similar ideas underpin Holdsworth's (2008) enquiry into television and memory and Wood and Taylor's (2008) work on the domestic nature of television in a changing media landscape. Both these latter research projects were based on ethnographic research and represent the first real engagement with primary research with the for-anyone-as-someone structure.

Three years later Anstead and O'Loughlin (2011) demonstrated how the "real-time" functions of audience online presence can be understood as a dialogue within the for-anyone-as-someone structure. Similarly, Batcho (2012) and Drissens, Joye & Biltereyst (2012) delved into the role of sound (specifically an event that drew attention to the constructed nature of sound on television) and the role of celebrity in fundraising on television respectively. Soffer (2012) engaged with the for-anyone-as-someone structure in the context of digital literacy and made the point that, unlike radio and television, digital texts are written to be read in silence (and not to be read aloud). Ekstrom, Eriksson and Kroon Lundell (2013) follow a similar argument, stressing the change in address and focus that accompany the move from a traditional media environment to a digital, interactive one.

None of these studies dealt with commercial culture (or, even, commercial speech); instead, they focused on forms of television that sought to educate or inform (and perhaps to entertain). This is understandable. In most parts of the world, including the USA, the television landscape includes some non-commercial (and / or uncommercialised) component. Scholars can then look to public broadcasters, or their equivalent, as sites where the care structure(s) Scannell identifies are in evidence. This approach normalizes non-commercial, or at least "normally" commercial broadcasting, where it would be reasonable to assume that those care structures work from a basis of treating the viewer as an informed citizen. Broadcasting systems where that basis is different – say, treating the viewer as a commodified commercial unit – are a different matter.

NEW ZEALAND TELEVISION AND COMMERCIALISM

New Zealand television is historically inter-linked with commercial messages; from the start public channels broadcast advertisements (Simmons 2004). And as television became more entrenched in everyday life, the social centrality of commercial speech likewise became normalised. Successive governments used the functional dependence on advertising as a

method to (attempt to) control the state-run broadcaster. At the end of the 1970s, a combination of politically-motivated underfunding, technological change and ideological framing had ensured that "television" was utterly reliant on advertising revenue. And as Nick Perry (2004: 85) states:

> The correlate was, of course, not just a continual expansion in the frequency and duration of commercial breaks. This was accompanied by a normalisation of the notion of advertisers as television's primary clients – a process with far-reaching implications for both program content and program scheduling.

The outcome of these developments were obvious. Once the broadcasting system was deregulated in the late 1980s the opportunities for advertisers to develop and present new forms of commercial speech were legion. Examples include programme sponsorship, advertorial programming and some of the highest levels of infomercial broadcasting in the English speaking world (Johnson 2013). At the same time, however, the implications of the ideological and practical centrality of commercial logics at the heart of television broadcasting are less obvious. Perhaps because of the incremental nature of change, the presence of commercial messages *within* individual programmes is less obvious to the casual viewer (Johnson & Hope 2004, Johnson & Hope 2001). Naturally, with the benefit of hindsight, one can observe how programmes and formats "used to be" less commercially-oriented. At the time of viewing, however, every successive modification of editorial content to fit advertising logics is relatively unremarkable (provided that content is successful in its entertainment or educational function).

Of course, the infiltration and impact of commercial messages are not manifest equally among genres and a significant amount of scholarship has been devoted to "serious" genres, such as news, current affairs and documentary (see, for instance, Atkinson 1994, Bell 1995, and Debrett 2004). The purpose of this article is to look to the television system in New Zealand *as a system*, with a particular focus on how that system accommodates Scannell's "care structure" within its highly commercialised context.

COMMODIFICATION AND BEING 'SOMEONE SPECIAL'

It is not my purpose here to survey the entirety of New Zealand television and use Scannell's for-anyone-as-someone care structure as the model to accomplish this. Rather, I aim to develop the basis on which such a critique may be made. On one level this seems to miss the point of Scannell's work – he, and others, use the for-anyone-as-someone structure to examine particular programmes or events within them. On another, however, the underlying

logic of Scannell's ideas is a BBC style broadcasting system, later extended to other locations by himself and other authors.

Central to Scannell's (2014) ideas is the notion of how television speaks. This is a literal concern – how does the thing called the television address me *as a viewer*? The correlate is then what kind of viewer am I supposed to be? These ideas can, and do, have a moral dimension. The system of broadcasting in which viewers are spoken to as rational, calm and ordinary human beings takes an (implicit) moral stand about the right to be informed, educated and entertained. That moral stand is best accessed by analysing the speech emanating from the system to the individual: it deliberately eschews the great power it has to confuse or manipulate the viewer; instead it gives them the courtesy of "depowering" to a register that they can accommodate. By contrast a system of broadcasting in which viewers are spoken to as commodified objects does not operate from a morally positive position. Instead, the positioning of the viewer commercially rather than informatively, educatively or in terms of entertainment places the exchange value of that viewer at the centre of the system. This works on two levels: first, the viewer is an item of exchange value in her own right (as audience ratings assume paramount importance); and second, she is spoken to centrally – and often only – as an economic agent across *all* aspects of the television mediascape.

This is a big claim; however, even the most cursory examination of the mediascape in New Zealand demonstrates its overwhelmingly commercial nature. There is no true public service station, no content quotas, no limitations on international programming, no limits on advertising minutes per hour, and no space for non-dominant internalised communicative logics on the part of those who work in the system. In fact, the commercial dynamic of the television system as a whole highlights Scannell's "care structure" as it is operationalised at a deep organisational level. Of course, in the absence of primary research, this is a truth claim in need of further enquiry. What is undeniable, however, is that the levels of commodification within the New Zealand mediascape problematise the normality of the claims Scannell and others make: if their views are based on particular social and historical manifestations of broadcasting, other manifestations will require explication before the universal validity of those claims can be judged.

CONCLUSION

One way to conceptualise the differences I am outlining here would be to think of a for-anyone-as-someone "special" structure. My purpose here is to draw attention to the method by which commercial speech looks to engender a sense of social and personal exclusivity in listeners and viewers. Advertising, public relations, branded content, viral marketing all attempt to position the receiver as lucky to have the opportunity to give their attention to the commercial message. Here, the relevance of the New Zealand example to Andrew Wernick's (1991: 3) observation remains crucial:

> All our contemporary discourse…is saturated in the rhetoric of promotion…It is virtually impossible…to think beyond or outside such promotional discourse; we are all drawn, voluntarily or otherwise, to play the 'game' of promotion…

Wernick's statement remains hyperbolic for most countries and situations; some, however small, vestiges of non-commercialised communication remain extant. In New Zealand, however, that does not apply. In order to prove such statements it is necessary to design and conduct research into the nature of (live) television within that mediascape. This programme of research would be based on the for-anyone-as-someone "special" structure as a conceptual space wherein all speech had a commercial basis (and all recipients of that speech were thought of as commercial actors). It would then use the results of this stage of the research to establish how (or even if) viewers in New Zealand accept or reject the for-anyone-as-someone "special" structure or if they prefer the rational, disinterested login of the original model proposed by Paddy Scannell.

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