cogitatio

EDITORIAL

Editorial: Redefining Televisuality—Programmes, Practices, and Methods

Susanne Eichner [1] and Lothar Mikos [2]

[1] Department of Media Studies, Film University Babelsberg, Germany
[2] Institute for Media and Communication Studies, Free University of Berlin, Germany

Correspondence: Susanne Eichner (s.eichner@filmuniversitaet.de)

Abstract

This thematic issue updates John T. Caldwell's concept of televisuality in response to digitalization, globalization, and streaming platforms like Netflix. It explores how traditional television, social media, and streaming intersect, reshaping audience practices, aesthetics, and cultural discourses. Key topics include binge-watching, meme culture, and the impact of datafication and global content. Case studies from Chile, Costa Rica, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, and the US illustrate the evolving media landscape.

1. Introduction

Thirty years after John T. Caldwell's publication on "televisuality" (Caldwell, 1995), television as a medium has changed radically. The processes of digitalization have had a wide impact not only on the technological infrastructures but on media industries with new players, market dynamics, and global and transnationally operating media companies; on audiences that are increasingly fragmented, personalized, and datafied; on media practices that are more individualized, mobile, and scattered across screens; on media products that reach beyond linguistic regions and follow new transnational flows of distribution. Television can be considered a transitional medium, as a medium in constant transition, caused by technological change as well as the associated political, legal, and economic frame conditions. Within this situation, streaming platforms such as Netflix can be seen as "re-invention of television" (Jenner, 2018). Televisuality is therefore still a topical concept in the 21st century but needs to be rethought.

In the early 1990s, US networks' competition with cable and their fight for economic survival gave rise to Caldwell's original concept of televisuality as a strategy to address the changing conditions. The concept addresses industrial dynamics, technological developments, aesthetic forms, and cultural discourses. In today's media landscape, social media, YouTube, and streaming platforms compete for audience attention across different global and local markets and media systems with effects on aesthetics, economies, and production. It has led to a convergence of formerly separated markets and industries as well as strategies and positions (González-Neira et al., 2022; Jenkins, 2006; Meikle & Young, 2017; Sparviero et al., 2017). Increasingly, traditional broadcasters are rethinking their mono-platform, -distribution, -device strategy in favour of a multiple approach with regard to distribution channels, devices, as well as content. Even if the concept of convergence can be viewed critically (Fagerjord & Storsul, 2007), it remains an important metaphor to describe the complex structure of different media, their content, and their audience.

Digitalization, globalization, and the resulting new market dynamics have impacted the development of television content and aesthetics. We have witnessed an overheated content competition, resulting in an increase in high-end quality serial narration and the "streaming wars" (Lobato & Lotz, 2021) that peaked in 2021, followed by a financial crisis and a decline in expensive high-end productions. "Peak TV has peaked" stated *The New York Times* accordingly (Koblin, 2022). Content providers readjust to the new situation towards also offering cheaper as well as innovative content that meets the needs of a new media generation, socialized with short clips and a user-generated meme culture (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). At the same time, the influence is not one-sided: The logics of the "old" medium of television are increasingly adopted by social media with its flow of endless scrolling (Faltesek et al., 2023) or Netflix and its turn towards event-oriented formats and sports (Ćitić, 2024). Television as a cultural form (Williams, 1974) outlasts technological and economic changes in an era of digitalized and economic convergence.

While digitalization and datafication processes currently propel changes, television has never been a fixed concept but has always been characterized by rapid developments. Already in 2004, Lynn Spigel discussed the "phase that comes after TV" (Spigel, 2004, p. 2) and pointed towards changing technological, industry-related, and governmental aspects that shape and change not only the face of television but its entire being. How can we, as media and television scholars, produce new insights and research perspectives on such a contested and fluid concept? As academic editors of this thematic issue, we propose to take John T. Caldwell's idea of televisuality that allows for a holistic view of the unique properties of television as an industrial product, technology, aesthetic form, and object of cultural discourse and audience engagement. The concept of televisuality designates a system of business conditions, styles, ideologies, cultural values, modes of production, programming, and audience practices that make up television as a medium within a specific historical and geographical context. As such, we suggest it is a concept that redefines television in its respective historical and societal context. For television studies, the concept of televisuality provides a rich and ever-changing prism for the analysis of its objects of study, as well as a constant challenge to our definition of the essence of TV as a medium and the question of how we can approach it both theoretically and methodologically.

The contributions gathered in this thematic issue discuss how the concept can be redefined within the contemporary context, where broadcast is transformed and complemented by streaming, where social networks are increasingly becoming video-based social media, where television texts are "unbound" and float as remixed cultural artefacts across channels, platforms, and media, and where the transnational

interconnections of the television and audiovisual industry, the conditions of economic and social crisis, and the changing audience practices are thoroughly transforming the medium. The thematic issue is largely inspired by the Biennial Conference of the Television Studies Section of ECREA (European Communication Research and Education Association) held on October 25–27, 2023, at the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF, in Potsdam, Germany.

Transferring the concept of televisuality from the 1990s to the age of streaming and multi-platform television, the issue opens with John T. Caldwell's (2025) reflection on the concept in times of over-production of so-called "PeakTV," to which streaming platforms have contributed. Particularly, Netflix has become synonymous with global/transnational streaming. With its global reach, it not only dominates global audiences but also the public and academic discourse on streaming. Michael L. Wayne and Deborah Castro (2025) discuss cultural authenticity as "Netflix Televisuality" and Frédérique Khazoom (2025) considers Netflix's local-language strategy within the logics of transnationalism and transnationally performed style. The significance of language and dubbing beyond Netflix is the focus of Simone Knox and Kai Hanno Schwind (2025) who provide a production studies perspective on dubbing, as the "machine" of translation has become more complex and globalized.

In the context of the datafication of streaming viewing, experiences have changed. With a study based on data donation, Karin van Es and Dennis Nguyen (2025) provide insight into the diverse and complex activity of binge-watching. A study by Ignacio Siles, Rodrigo Muñoz-González, Luciana Valerio-Alfaro, and Vanessa Valiati (2025) looks at practices of rewatching as a source of pleasure and comfort. Not only viewing practices are affected by the changing conditions, but social media platforms reuse and adapt televisual content, audiences communicate about televisual content via social media, and these social media are increasingly following the principle of televisuality. Ellenrose Firth and Alberto Marinelli (2025) conceptualize the algorithmic flow of TikTok as a televisual experience. Jana Zündel (2025) examines how social media adopts televisual content into "memeable" snippets and Kim Carina Hebben and Christine Piepiorka (2025) propose the concept of dis/array to understand the reorganization and fragmentation into snippets as a transformation of television.

The global distribution of content such as drama series and news has changed televisuality in terms of production, narrative, aesthetics, and interaction with social media. In addition, social discourses and societal developments affect the production landscape in the age of global streaming. Axelle Asmar, Tim Raats, and Leo Van Audenhove (2025) critically discuss diversity in connection to Netflix and the company's position between social responsibility and commercial imperatives. Berber Hagedoorn and Sandra Becker (2025) analyze the impact of the Audiovisual Media Service Directive on genre and cultural diversity in a European context, drawing on the Netherlands as a case study. Juliane Wegner (2025) provides an insight into televisual inequalities with regard to gender representation during Covid-19 in Germany.

Case studies from different global regions also broach issues of aesthetic and structural aspects of televisuality: Consuelo Ábalos (2025) contributes a case study from Chile, investigating how Netflix combines Scandinavian genre aesthetics with Latin American melodrama to appeal to Chilean audiences. By critically analyzing queer characters in scripted television series, Traci B. Abbott (2025) reveals the entrenched binary ideals of queer representations in US-American teen drama series. Andreea Alina Mogoș and Constantin Trofin (2025) present an analysis of the Romanian television landscape and changes in visual conventions during the past years.

Next to content-related, aesthetic, and structural aspects of televisuality, the contributions deal with case studies from different countries: Chile (Ábalos, 2025), Costa Rica (Siles et al., 2025), Germany (Wegner, 2025), the Netherlands (Hagedoorn & Becker, 2025; van Es & Nguyen, 2025), Romania (Mogoş & Trofin, 2025), and the US (Abbott, 2025).

The gathered articles shed light on the manifold aspects of televisuality in times in which several televisual media forms interact with each other. Traditional linear television exists alongside datafied, algorithm-driven streaming, social media, YouTube, and short-form TikTok. Audiences around the world use all these forms in different intensities and exchange ideas about them, in direct conversation in everyday life and on social media. We believe that the updated concept of televisuality can be used to analyze the technical and industrial dynamics as well as the aesthetic forms and cultural discourses in the datafied and global media landscape of the 21st century.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Ábalos, C. (2025). When Latin American melodrama meets Nordic noir: How SVOD reshapes Chilean TV fiction. *Media and Communication*, *13*, 9586. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9586

Abbott, T. B. (2025). Gen Z sexual and gender fluidity in US scripted television. *Media and Communication*, *13*, Article 9374. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9374

Asmar, A., Raats, T., & Van Audenhove, L. (2025). Producing diversity: On the discourses at the heart of Netflix's production culture. *Media and Communication*, *13*, Article 9410. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9410

Caldwell, J. T. (1995). *Televisuality: Style, crisis, and authority in American television*. Rutgers University Press.

Caldwell, J. T. (2025). 21st Century televisuality? Golden ages and collateral damage in industry stress research. *Media and Communication*, *13*, 9435. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9435

Ćitić, T. (2024). From linear habits to non-linear consumption of sports content. *SPORTICOPEDIA—SMB*, *2*(1), 183–194. https://doi.org/10.58984/smbic240201183c

Fagerjord, A., & Storsul, T. (2007). Questioning convergence. In T. Storsul & D. Stuedahl (Eds.), *Ambivalence towards convergence. Digitalization and media change* (pp. 19–31). Nordicom.

Faltesek, D., Graalum, E., Breving, B., Knudsen, E., Lucas, J., Young, S., & Varas Zambrano, F. E. (2023). TikTok as television. *Social Media + Society*, *9*(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231194576

Firth, E., & Marinelli, A. (2025). Datacasting: TikTok's algorithmic flow as televisual experience. *Media and Communication*, *13*, Article 9392. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9392

González-Neira, A., Vázquez-Herrero, J., & Quintas-Froufe, N. (2022). Convergence of linear television and digital platforms: An analysis of YouTube offer and consumption. *European Journal of Communication*, *37*(4), 426–442. https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231211054720

Hagedoorn, B., & Becker, S. (2025). Beyond the Dutch quota: Media policy and cultural diversity in local video-on-demand production (2013–2023). *Media and Communication*, *13*, 9593. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9593

Hebben, K. C., & Piepiorka, C. (2025). Easy to snack—Hard to digest? Strategies of dis/array in streaming, social media, and television. *Media and Communication*, *13*, Article 9430. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9430

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture. Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.

Jenner, M. (2018). *Netflix and the re-invention of television*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Khazoom, F. (2025). Televisuality on a global scale: Netflix's local-language strategy. *Media and Communication*, *13*, Article 9356. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9356

Knox, S., & Schwind, K. H. (2025). Oblique agency: Mapping the globalised workflows of television dubbing and their impact on practitioners. *Media and Communication*, *13*, 9613. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9613

Koblin, J. (2022, December 18). Streaming's golden age is suddenly dimming. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/18/business/media/streaming-tv-shows-canceled.html

Lobato, R., & Lotz, A. (2021). Beyond streaming wars: Rethinking competition in video services. *Media Industries*, *8*(1), 89–108. https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.1338

Meikle, G., & Young, S. (2017). *Media convergence*. Bloomsbury.

Mogoş, A. A., & Trofin, C. (2025). Romanian televisuality in the post-broadcast era: Visual signature of popular news TV talk shows. *Media and Communication*, *13*, Article 9423. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9423

Siles, I., Muñoz-González, R., Valerio-Alfaro, L., & Valiati, V. (2025). Rewatching content on streaming platforms: The pursuit of ontological comfort. *Media and Communication*, *13*, Article 9338. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9338

Sparviero, S., Peil, C., & Balbi, G. (Eds.). (2017). *Media convergence and deconvergence*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51289-1

Spigel, L. (2004). Introduction. In L. Spigel & J. Olsson (Eds.), *Television after TV: Essays on a medium in transition* (pp. 1–40). Duke University Press.

van Es, K., & Nguyen, D. (2025). Binge-watching Netflix? Insights from data donations. *Media and Communication*, *13*, Article 9362. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9362

Wayne, M. L., & Castro, D. (2025). Cultural authenticity as Netflix televisuality: Streaming industry discourse and globally commissioned original series. *Media and Communication*, *13*, Article 9407. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9407

Wegner, J. (2025). Televisual inequalities and gender dynamics in German news: Health experts during the Covid-19 crisis. *Media and Communication*, *13*, Article 9395. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9395

Williams, R. (1974). *Television. Technology and cultural form*. Fontana.

Zulli, D., & Zulli, D. J. (2022). Extending the internet meme: Conceptualizing technological mimesis and imitation publics on the TikTok platform. *New Media & Society*, *24*(8), 1872–1890. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820983603

Zündel, J. (2025). Between memeability and televisuality: The (self-)memefication of television series. *Media and Communication*, *13*, Article 9408. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9408

About the Authors

Susanne Eichner is professor in analysis and aesthetic of audiovisual media at the Film University in Potsdam, Germany. Her research focuses on the circulation of transnational television/streaming and on matters of representation and agency. Since 2020, she is chair of the IAMCR section Mediated Communication, Public Opinion and Society. Her publications include: *New Challenges in European Television. National Experiences in a Transnational Context* (co-editor, 2022), *Agency and Media Reception* (monography, 2014), and *Transnationale Serienkultur* (co-editor, 2013).

Lothar Mikos is professor emeritus of television studies in the Department of Media Studies at the Film University in Potsdam, Germany, and honorary professor of media and communication studies at Free University Berlin, Germany. He founded the Television Studies Section of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). His main areas of work are global media and platform economy, digital distribution, transmedia storytelling, popular film and television genres and formats, and qualitative audience studies. His publications include: *Cross-Cultural Television Audiences in the Age of Streaming. Revisiting 'The Export of Meaning'* (co-editor 2025, forthcoming), *Film- und Fernsehanalyse* (4th edition, 2023), *Der politische Klimadiskurs* (co-author, 2022), and *Young and Creative: Digital Technologies Empowering Children in Everyday Life* (co-editor 2018).