

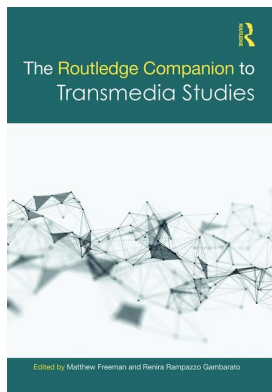
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3

TRANSMEDIA TELEVISION

Flow, Glance, and the BBC

Elizabeth Evans

Transmedia strategies are becoming an increasingly everyday part of the television industry and televisual experiences. Paul Grainge and Catherine Johnson describe transmedia promotion, for instance, as ever more “commonplace” within television (Grainge and Johnson 2015, 124). Digital technologies including the Internet, laptops, smartphones, and tablets have opened up not only new, transmedial ways of watching television content, but also brought new companies into the sector, challenging the boundaries of what “television” is. However, despite the apparent “newness” of these developments, television and transmediality have a long conceptual and empirical history. In particular, some of the foundational theories of television studies continue to be useful for considering how transmedia logics are applied to television.

This chapter will consider two of these theories: Raymond Williams’ model of flow and John Ellis’ “glance theory.” It will explore parallels between the broadcast television phenomena explored through each theory and key characteristics of *transmedia* television. The final section of this chapter will explore how conceptual linkages between television studies and transmedia studies play out within an institutional context. In particular, it will address how notions of transmediality have been at the heart of television since its inception and have merely become more prominent with the embracing of digital platforms. The focus here will be on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the UK’s leading public service broadcaster, and how the Corporation has in fact operated as “transmedia television” since television broadcasting began.

Television, Transmediality, and Time: Liveness and Flow

The first alignment between television and transmediality relates to the importance of time to our understanding of both. Television, especially television broadcasting, is a fundamentally temporal medium. Even as changes such as personal video recorders (PVRs) and video-on-demand (VOD) allow audiences to access television content whenever they choose, the temporal qualities of television persist. Television’s liveness, its ability to broadcast events as they happen, is often held up as both a defining characteristic of television broadcasting (Gripsrud 1998, 19; Carroll 2003, 268) and as a legitimating factor that elevates it as “worthy” (Levine 2008). Within the context of transmedia television, practices of transmedia storytelling and transmedia marketing have been used to reinforce live viewing in light of PVRs and VOD services that fragment the audience and, crucially, allow them to skip adverts (see Tussey 2014, 206; Evans 2015, 121–122; Grainge and Johnson 2015, 120). However, it is Raymond Williams’ model of television as “flow” that most usefully brings the temporalities of television together with the temporality of transmediality, especially transmedia storytelling.

In his model of “flow,” British cultural theorist Williams recounts his experience of US television upon his arrival in Miami after a long transatlantic sea voyage. In a now seminal anecdote, he describes how three different films (one being broadcast in full, the others in the form of trailers) became interspersed with adverts and became one continuous, but incongruous, sequence. As he describes:

A crime in San Francisco (the subject of the original film) began to operate in an extraordinary counterpoint not only with the deodorant and cereal commercials but with a romance in Paris and the eruption of a prehistoric monster who laid waste to New York.
(2003 [1974], 92)

This experience led him to the formulation that:

it may be even more important to see the true process [of television] as flow: the replacement of a programme series of timed sequential units by a flow series of differently relates units in which the timing, though real, is undeclared, and in which the real internal organisation is something other than the declared organisation.
(2003 [1974], 93)

He argues that this flow of related, unrelated, and semi-related content units is a planned part of television’s structure. Television, in essence, becomes a collection of different segments of content that are brought together into a whole larger than any individual segment and guided by an ever-present, though potentially invisible, time-based organizational structure.

“Flow” has subsequently become one of the foundational models of television studies, regarded as a defining characteristic of the medium itself (Gripsrud 1998). The organization of television’s flow into a schedule functions as a way to structure its endlessness (Ellis 2000, 130–147) and to frame program content for audiences (Weissman 2017). The rise of digital technologies, especially those that allow audiences greater control over their televisual experiences, have been positioned as challenging the centrality of Williams’ model to television studies (see, for example, Kompare 2006; Mittell 2011). However, scholars such as Catherine Johnson have argued not only for the continued value of understanding flow in terms of television broadcasting (2013) but also of its application to the newer strategies of programming, marketing, and distribution that are emerging around television (2016).

Key to flow’s contribution to understanding transmedia television is its highlighting of the blurred boundaries that exist between different kinds of television content and how audiences need to navigate their way through those blurred boundaries. Whereas the organizational structure for Williams’ model is broadcasting, the same concepts can be usefully applied when that organizational structure is transmediality. Most notably, some of the earliest work to consider transmedia television applied the metaphor of flow to their case studies. John Caldwell explores a number of case studies including how events in the television series *Homicide: Life on the Streets* were extended into online videos and viewers were invited to help solve diegetic crimes (2003). Will Brooker, meanwhile, examined online expansions for teen drama *Dawson’s Creek* in which viewers were able to uncover additional backstory about the characters and purchase clothing seen on the program. Although neither uses the term “transmedia storytelling” to describe the phenomenon they discuss, their case studies clearly fit the pattern of a narrative deliberately and coherently expanded across different media and as such form examples of nascent digital televisual transmedia storytelling. Notions of flow appear throughout both discussions. For Caldwell, flow operates at the level of an audience who are increasingly moving across different media platforms when he argues that, “programming strategies have shifted from notions of network *program* ‘flows’ to tactics of *audience/user* ‘flows’” (2003, 136, original emphasis). For Brooker, it is how content “overflows” the boundaries of television (2004). As both scholars demonstrate, metaphors of the flow model remain relevant to the transmedia expansion of television.

We can further develop the alignment between transmediality and televisual flow by considering two key characteristics they both share. Both flow and transmediality are concerned with the creation of coherent audience experiences across different pieces of content. Within Williams' theory, the structures of broadcasting move audiences from one piece of content to another. This smooth movement—of audiences and of content—becomes key to ensuring audiences can successfully navigate and “flow” across different media. As Catherine Johnson has argued, the content that sits between television episodes (called “junctions”) serve to “bring clarity and order” (2013, 123). Johnson goes on to explore how continuity announcers and idents, those short pieces of content that identify which channel is being watched, mark the points where content changes from program to trailer or adverts and back to program again but also creates coherency through a single brand identity (2013). Within transmedia contexts, overt directions or continuity in authorship and narrative features such as characters serve a similar purpose (Evans 2011a, 28). Instead of keeping the audience watching the same channel, however, the purpose is instead to keep audiences within a transmedia narrative by moving to non-televisual spaces, from the television channel to a website or to even non-audiovisual content. In many ways, by directing audiences away from the television set, onto other screen devices and toward non-televisual forms of content, transmedia television invites audiences to break one flow (that of the television channel) by creating and privileging another (that of the transmedia narrative world). However, both processes actually share the fundamental characteristic of moving audiences between different forms of content in a way that feels coherent and connected.

If the first characteristic shared between televisual flow and transmediality explores how audiences are moved away from television content, the second relates to how they are constantly drawn *back* to television. A frequent use of transmedia content within television is as a bridge between episodes or even seasons of a television series. This particularly occurs in relation to “serial” narratives, in which story arcs are told over a number of weeks with little or no narrative resolution in individual episodes (see Creeber 2004). In addition to “channel flow,” we can therefore also consider “serial flow,” that televisual storyworlds have necessary temporal gaps within them that take viewers away from the storyworld and toward other content. In these cases, transmedia strategies work to reinforce a sense of televisual flow by maintaining audience interest in a particular series through additional, transmedia content (see Evans 2011a, 37) and ultimately directing them back to the next television episode. Transmedia flows direct audiences away from the television set but also back toward it.

Notions of time and flow are therefore the first parallel between how television and transmediality can be understood. Both ultimately share a number of characteristics, of working to move audiences in particular ways, of working within expanded, serial narrative formats and of creating an overarching coherent experience. Looking to one of the foundational models of television studies, Williams' flow, therefore offers one useful way of understanding transmedia strategies.

The Domesticity of Transmedia Television: Mediating the Glance

If flow connects television and transmediality through the temporal dimensions of both, the second key conceptual framework examined here connects them through the position of televisual technologies within daily life, especially the home. Television has traditionally been understood as a domestic medium, with a consistent strand of television studies positioning television within the social, spatial, technological, and temporal dynamics of the home (see, for example, Morley 1986; Spigel 1992; Silverstone 1994; Gauntlett and Hill 1999). Of the foundational theories concerning television and the domestic, John Ellis' theory of the television “glance” is most valuable for exploring the relationship between television and transmediality. Ellis argues that because television is fundamentally a domestic medium, it:

does not encourage the same degree of spectator concentration. There is no surrounding darkness, no anonymity of the fellow viewers, no large image, no lack of movement amongst

the spectators, no rapt attention. TV is not usually the only thing going on, sometimes it is not even the principal thing. TV is treated casually rather than concentratedly.

(Ellis 1982, 128)

As a result, he argues, viewers do not “gaze” at the screen as they would do in the cinema, but instead “glance” at the television set as their attention is drawn elsewhere: “the gaze implies a concentration of the spectator’s activity into that of looking, the glance implies that no extraordinary effort is being invested in the activity of looking” (1982, 137). Whilst much work has debated Ellis’ model, arguing instead that television viewing can be focused and attentive (see, for example, Bacon-Smith 1992, 128; Caldwell 1995, 25–27; Brooker 2005; Evans 2011a, 143), the increasingly transmedial nature of the television industry, the content it produces and the context in which it is consumed makes his argument ever more relevant.

The connection between Ellis’s glance theory and notions of transmediality emerges when considering the ways in which digital technologies, most notably portable screen devices, have been integrated into the daily practices of both the television industry and television audiences. On the one hand, transmedia distribution strategies mean that television has left the home via portable screen devices. Whilst Anna McCarthy (2001) has identified a history of television in public spaces, the development of portable screen devices has amplified the convergence between television and non-domestic viewing. Television broadcasters have increasingly developed video-on-demand (VOD) strategies that allow access to television content via laptops, tablets, and smartphones. Companies such as Netflix and Amazon now operate as part of the television industry and equally have inherently transmedial approaches to distribution. As a result, television is not just available at home through the television set; it has expanded onto buses and trains, into cafes and waiting rooms. These spaces are perhaps even more distraction-filled than the home, filled with the general public and other calls on our attention such as the end of our journey or the start of an appointment (Evans 2011a, 142–143). Notions of “glance” therefore become key to television’s transmedia expansion outside of the home.

On the other hand, the intersection between the television glance and transmediality has also been drawn out by more recent scholarship that considers how digital technologies have been integrated into the home itself. Key to this is the emergence of “second screen” practices. In such practices, portable media devices (usually a smartphone or tablet) are used alongside the television screen to access online material that may or may not be related to televisual content. Companion apps such as those for *The X Factor* (ITV 2004–) provide gaming opportunities or additional behind the scenes material (see Evans 2015). They therefore function as “transmedia” in a broad sense. In some cases, they may fit patterns of transmedia storytelling, in others they may function more as transmedia marketing or branding, and in others as transmedia distribution. They continue, however, to demonstrate how fundamental transmedia practices have come to be for the television industry and its audiences. In particular, how transmedia strategies facilitate a form of “mediated glance” (Evans 2015, 124).

Hye Jin Lee and Mark Andrejevic argue that the second screen environment “has encouraged the [television] industry to examine potential ways to capitalize on people’s propensity to simultaneously watching and browse (or watching and connect/socialize)” (2014, 42). This is often done through the creation of companion apps. These apps are designed to run “live” alongside the broadcast of content ranging from one-hour dramas to reality shows. They facilitate community discussions, include quizzes and puzzles, or provide extra information about the content appearing on the television screen (see also Tussey, 2014). Lee and Andrejevic identify how such strategies serve to reinforce the television industry’s parameters within this more transmedial environment. They argue that second screen companion apps are “designed to fold television viewing into the monitored embrace of a digital enclosure: a commercial surround in which one’s activities are recorded, stored and mined for marketing purposes” (Lee and Andrejevic 2014, 53). For an increasingly transmedial television industry, creating their own spaces within the app culture of smartphones and tablets allows them to marshal, manage, and monitor audience behavior away from the television set.

Other scholars, however, present a less ideal alignment between the television industry's aims to use second screen devices to "enclose" digital behavior and the realities of audience's second screen behavior. Sheryl Wilson conducted focus groups with audiences around second screen use and found little alignment between such use and television content (2016, 183). Elizabeth Evans, Tim Coughlan, and Vicky Coughlan (2017) equally challenge the framing of second screen activities within the concerted strategies of the television industry. Their aim was to use monitoring technology including cameras and IP (internet protocol) trackers to map the kinds of behaviors implied in Lee and Andrejevic and Tussey's work, in which companion apps work to enclose television-related transmedia behavior. However, they argue that "what actually emerged was relatively little such behaviour" (Evans, Coughlan, and Coughlan 2017, 8). Instead, they found that second screen activities consisted of "disconnected, ephemeral and forgettable multiplatform experiences" (Evans, Coughlan, and Coughlan 2017, 8).

The kinds of experiences that these second screen strategies for television, which extend audience experiences with content transmedially, encourage for their audiences can be usefully understood by returning to Ellis' glance theory. In particular, Ellis' model is useful for its recognition that television has always competed for viewer attention. Within a transmedia televisual culture, that competition now not only consists of the mundane activities of domestic life, but also mediated spaces (Evans 2015, 124) that offer more media content on a different device. As such, the emergence of second screen activities is simply an extension of television's pre-existing conditions of use. Just as Ellis frames television as an inherently distracted behavior, multitasking is equally (if not more so) inherently distracted. Dan Hassoun describes second screen activities as "simultaneous media use," a label that immediately connects them with notions of attention and distraction. He argues that much scholarly attention on converged or transmedia behavior presumes "that users engage with this content one medium at a time" (2012, 273–274). Ideas of transmedia storytelling in which audiences move from one piece of content to another present a similar impression. However, Hassoun instead argues that it is necessary to recognize how "the rise of 'interactive' media has only multiplied the potentials for distraction and split attention in various environments" (2012, 274). Transmedia content and distribution strategies such as companion apps allow broadcasters to keep that distraction within spaces that they ultimately control and manage through what can be understood as "mediated glances" (Evans 2015, 124). Just as notions of television's flow can be applied and adapted to fit the context of transmedia television, so too can an understanding of how television sits, as it always has done, within fragmented and distracted viewer attention. The core ways of understanding broadcast television also offer clear insight into understanding transmedia television.

Case Study: The BBC as Transmedia Television

The above discussion demonstrated how transmedia television can be usefully examined within the frameworks already provided by television studies. More broadly, whilst television has undergone significant changes as a result of digital technologies and transmedia strategies, those changes should not be taken as a radical departure from the way television has always functioned. To a certain extent, the television industry has indeed turned to transmedia strategies as a means to respond to perceived changes in audience behavior. Technological developments such as PVRs, online viewing, and portable screen devices have contributed to a shifting of the previously stable ground on which television stood and an undermining of its core distribution technology of broadcasting.

However, as the above discussion has indicated, the changes wrought by an increasingly transmedial television culture have equally re-emphasized some of the foundational principles of television as both a media form and as a field of scholarship. The relevance of transmediality to television (and vice versa) becomes even more apparent when looking at a case study of UK public service broadcaster the BBC. Examining the corporation's history and current strategies demonstrates how television and transmediality have a long, intertwined relationship.

The BBC was initially launched as a radio broadcaster in 1922. However, only a year later the Corporation had moved into publishing with listings magazine *The Radio Times* and within a decade of its founding took responsibility for developing television services and content, becoming the focal point around which early television experiments coalesced (see Aldridge 2012, 70). From its first decade, then, the BBC began acting not as a radio broadcaster, but as a transmedia institution, a strategy that has only continued since the 1930s. The Corporation's adoption of a text-based television information service, Ceefax, in the early 1970s meant that BBC audiences accessed a combination of audiovisual and text-based materials long before the Internet. The BBC Micro program, an early home computer system, placed it within the computing sector. Throughout its history, BBC programs have been expanded through ancillary markets, merchandise, and early forms of transmedia storytelling (Evans 2011a, 23; Jacobs and Thomas 2017, 12–13). Online services became part of the Corporation's activities as early as 1994 (see Naylor et al. 2000, 140) and the requirement to develop "digital Britain" was officially integrated into its public service remit from 2006 onwards. As an organization, the BBC has always worked across different media and worked to move audiences between different media, often taking a leading role in helping audiences to embrace new media platforms. It is this process of movement, of not simply producing content on different platforms but structuring audience experience across those different platforms, that demonstrates how the "television" of the BBC has always been transmedial.

The BBC's digital strategies further demonstrate how BBC "television" content is often inherently transmedial. James Bennett, for instance, has explored the Corporation's coverage of D-Day commemorations in 2004. This coverage was not only transmedial, but originated with the new media team and then expanded *onto* television (Bennett 2008, 282), undermining any sense of digital platforms simply serving television. The Corporation's strategies for children's content has made use of apps such as Go CBBC and CBeebies Storytime to develop safe spaces for extending children's engagement with television content into gaming spaces. Paul Grainge and Catherine Johnson have explored how the BBC, alongside digital agency Red Bee Media, have employed strategies of transmedia promotion for major natural history series such as *Planet Earth Live* (Grainge and Johnson 2015, 123–134). From the perspective of transmedia distribution, the BBC iPlayer, which allows viewers to access television and radio content for at least 30 days, has come to represent the gold standard of television catch-up services. Across the corporation's activities, strategies that blur the boundaries between media forms and that work to move audiences between the television, their computer, and mobile device or between televisual, prose-based, and gaming content are apparent. Two particular examples of such transmedia strategies—the *Doctor Who Adventure Games* and BBC Three—illuminate both the BBC's role as transmedia television and the continued relevance of flow and glance to understanding this role.

The first example, the *Doctor Who Adventure Games*, points to how transmedia storytelling serves as a way to craft and manage both televisual and transmedia "flows." *Doctor Who* has been one of the BBC's core transmedia brands. Since its first broadcast in 1963, the series has served as a key case study for the licensed expansion of television content and, more recently, transmedia storytelling and branding (see Perryman 2008; Evans 2011a). Here I shall focus on a collection of video games created alongside the first season featuring the Eleventh Doctor (Matt Smith) in 2010. The games could be downloaded for free via the official *Doctor Who* webpage. They were positioned as additional episodes of the television series and, although developed by independent games company Sumo Interactive, were written by several members of the television production team. Four games were released in June 2010 with an additional game launched in October 2011 (see Evans 2014). Most notably, the games were framed in relation to the television episodes in a way that served to move audiences between the television set and the computer, and between viewing the episodes and playing a game, but maintained a sense of coherency. The games not only expanded the content of the television series transmedially, giving the audience new adventures featuring the Doctor and his companions, Amy and Rory, but also involved the crafting of an ideal transmedia user flow from

the television series to the games. This in turn served as a bridge in the gap between seasons of the television program.

The games are placed within the official canon of the series. Victoria Jaye, then Head of Multiplatform Commissioning for the BBC, discussed the games as “very much conceived as part of the TV series as four interactive episodes ... it’s still very much of the *Doctor Who* canon” (Evans 2011b, 111). The official *Doctor Who: The Encyclopedia* positions each game within the story arc of the corresponding television series (Russell 2011, 400), reinforcing the serial flow of the series as encompassing television and gaming. The transmedia flow of *Doctor Who* also formed a core part of the BBC’s continuity and marketing strategy. At the end of the final episode of Matt Smith’s first series as the Doctor in 2010, titled “The Pandorica Opens” (tx 26/06/2010), the continuity announcer not only directed audiences to other television-based *Doctor Who* content, but also to a series of books. Immediately afterwards, a trailer ran for the *Adventure Games*. On the one hand, this moment uses the relationship between components of the television broadcast flow to initiate the audience’s movement onto a different platform and a different form of media content. The transmedia flow of the series was positioned as usurping the broadcast flow of the television channel. On the other hand, the trailer itself explicitly and aesthetically used the notion of transmedia flow. It began with a photographic image of Matt Smith as the Doctor from the television series. That image then mutated and transformed into his videographic likeness from the video game. A visual sense of flow from televisual space to digital space was therefore constructed at the same time as the advertisement worked to encourage the audience’s movement from the television set to the computer.

A more recent, and dramatic, strategy enacted by the BBC further demonstrates how intertwined transmediality and television are. In March 2014, the BBC announced that it would be transforming its youth-oriented channel, BBC Three, into an online-only channel. The move was framed in terms that spoke to the variety and multiplicity of transmedia content that moving away from the broadcast schedule would allow. Damien Kavanagh, the controller of BBC Three, announced that the new channel would be able to function across different media forms, producing:

a range of content which we know young audiences consume and we want to innovate in—short form video, image led storytelling, votes on reactive topics or blog posts from contributors that will make people laugh and think and deliver a richer experience around our content.

(Kavanagh 2014)

Kavanagh’s reference to audience participation and storytelling through different media forms speaks to models of transmedia storytelling. However, more central to the move were attempts by the BBC to utilize transmedia distribution for the channel by creating content that would live across different media spaces and platforms.

The conversion of BBC Three to online-only is, currently, the digital epitome of the BBC as transmedia television. On the one hand, the move places digital platforms such as the Internet on an equal footing with broadcasting. As a consequence, audiences are moved across different media platforms but always within the “enclosure” of the BBC. As it has been throughout its history, the BBC continues to operate transmedially. On the other hand, it also again reiterates the translation of the foundational theories of television studies into transmedia strategies. Although it may seem that becoming an on-demand service removes the relevance of channel flows, Catherine Johnson has argued that such services are not at all divorced from notions of flow (2017). Such a situation is evident in looking at how elements of flow are retained within BBC Three’s home on the iPlayer. Each episode has an individual page that not only allows the viewer to watch that episode but also directs them toward other, related content from BBC Three and the BBC more widely. These hyperlinks function in a similar way to how continuity announcers direct viewers to stay tuned in the junctions after broadcast episodes. At the end of each episode, the following episode in the series is lined up for

automatic playback, literally flowing from one episode to the next. Episodes of individual series are still released weekly, reiterating the ebb and flow of serialized television broadcasting. Each of these elements again demonstrate the value in retaining core models of television as the medium becomes more and more transmedial.

Conclusion

Television (and television studies) and ideas of transmediality have a closely entwined relationship. Two of the foundational models of television studies offer applicable frameworks for understanding how television functions as transmedia. Raymond Williams' model of televisual "flow" is relevant for how audiences are moved between the different segments of transmedia content, how they are directed to remain within that content's parameters. John Ellis' "glance" theory speaks to how distraction can be kept within spaces owned and controlled by television broadcasters via transmedia strategies. A case study of the BBC, one of the oldest television institutions, further reiterates the intersection between television and transmediality both at an operational level in the practices of television broadcasters, but also at a strategic level through transmedia storytelling or distribution. This chapter has therefore demonstrated how, as the BBC and other broadcasters seek out ways to address perceived changes in audience behavior, they are in fact working within a long tradition of industrial practice that has long seen the scope of television as transmediality.

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