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Popular TV Criticism

Flow Conference 2008

One of the biggest issues facing popular television critics is “What to watch?” The shows that fill up the primetime slots don’t always lend themselves to criticism, reality TV in particular. With reality series that have countless seasons, the critiques of the show will neither make the network cancel it or the viewers tune out. It’s even hard to keep up with ones such as *Big Brother* which airs on CBS three nights a week, on Showtime every night (in the form of *Big Brother After Dark*) and online 24/7. A critique of such a show can easily turn into a lengthy recap.

Another issue is “How long does one give a show till they should give up?” If judged solely on the first few episodes of a new show, the critic (and critic’s reader) may miss out on a possible gem. The pilot and subsequent couple of installments of *30 Rock* were cute and likable (which may not be enough to keep viewers on board) but it has become, through refinement of its style and conventions, one of the best comedies on television. The TV Club, part of The Onion’s A.V. Club, brings an episodic wrap-up/critique until the reviewer can no longer stomach the show or the readership is truly abysmal.

Last season’s Writers’ Guild Strike was the first in almost two decades and left many television viewers hurting. After first-run programming ran dry, new reality shows came

out of the woodwork and networks gave a big push for their mid-season replacements. Critics were left with less to work with. The possibility of the strike carrying on further would have turned primetime into a rerun riddled, reality addled zone, more so than it already was.

Like every television network, every publication is owned by a larger company, sometimes by the same company as the shows, which said publication critiques. Time Warner owns *Entertainment Weekly* and the shows *Chuck* and *Gossip Girl*. MTV owns College Publisher which is the website technology *The Daily Texan* utilizes, making the newspaper affiliated with Viacom. With this synergy between mediums and company, there must not be any kind of corporate interference or fear mongering. If Ken Tucker of *Entertainment Weekly* wrote an unfavorable review for *Without A Trace* then Time Warner should not be allowed to punish the writer for his opinion.

Online programming may be one of the trickiest aspects for television as a whole. With the advent of Hulu.com and other network affiliated websites, now whole episodes are available anytime anywhere. Hulu not only has major television shows but also movies and online shorts. While specific online programming has not taken off (i.e. NBC's *Quarterlife* debacle), it doesn't seem far off. If the Internet continues to create and evolve its creative programming, critics will also have to pay attention to what comes across the bandwidth as well as the airwaves.

Blogs have made the saying “everyone’s a critic” quite literal. For the most part blogs are cheap and easy to create. It allows all the ability to critique anything and everything. While some blogs like the aforementioned TV Club are entertaining and informative, others are just run by Joe Somebody who doesn’t take the idea of criticism to heart. Instead of just saying a show “rocks” or “sucks,” the blogger should make an attempt, at least, to utilize their brain to provide a well thought and informative opinion. Blogs are a step forward in personal expression but also a small hurdle in the way of intellectual criticism.

Criticism is never going to go away. A majority of the public depends upon critics to tell them what to watch or offer a similar opinion for vindication. As long as TV critics are able to adapt with technological advances and compete with the countless amounts of bloggers, the state of popular TV criticism should be in safe hands.