

**Television and Global Flow**  
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The aim of this presentation is to focus on theorizations of global television by using the concept of “flow” which is central to both television studies and globalization studies. I propose to build on the common ground between television studies and globalization studies by articulating Arjun Appadurai’s theory of global flows to Raymond Williams’s theory of television flow.

By bringing these two key theorists of flow into a dialogue, I want to argue that television studies and globalization studies share a common set of concerns about flow -- in both theoretical and empirical terms – which must be explored further to gain better understanding of both globalization and television in our world today.

In television studies, flow is a multi-accentuated term. Traditionally, in television studies – and in the television industry – flow refers to the programming and scheduling strategies used by network executives to overcome the gaps created by commercials and publicity announcements and capture audience attention from one program to the next, and from one segment of a program to the next.

For Raymond Williams, flow is less about the strategies of audience capture used by network executives, and more about the ways in which audiences are able to watch television as a seamless narrative in spite of the interruptions across programs, and within program segments. These interruptions, Williams argues, are not to be understood as mere gaps in the schedule, but as planned breaks around which discrete programs are structured into a linear sequence that constitutes the television flow. For Raymond Williams, the phenomenon of a “planned flow” is thus a defining characteristic of broadcasting as a technology and a cultural form that emerges from the interaction between audiences and television programming in any given viewing context.

In globalization studies too, flow has multiple definitions. In international communications, for instance, flow is defined in terms of the uneven exchanges of communication across nations due to inequities of power in global affairs. This model of flow in international communications emerges from mass communication studies, where flow is understood in terms a linear process of transmission from a given source to any receiver. Here I am referring to S-M-C-R (Source-Message-Channel-Receiver) models, and their variations in two-step flow and multi-step flow models that have been very influential in theorizations of the politics, economics and technologies of communication in the social sciences.

More recently, in globalization studies, flow has been theorized by Arjun Appadurai an elementary framework for understanding the cultural dimensions of globalization. For Appadurai, flow does not refer to the linear transmission of communication from a powerful sender to a relatively powerless receiver in international affairs, but to a complex, overlapping order of disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. To describe this new emerging order of globalization, Appadurai maps five dimensions

of flow consisting of ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples and ideoscaples. 'Ethnoscaples' refer to movement of people as workers, tourists, students, immigrants, refugees and others. 'Technoscaples' refer to technologies that move at high speeds across traditionally impervious boundaries. 'Financescaples' refer to rapid movements of capital on a global scale. 'Mediascaples' refer to both the global media that enable electronic transmission of information and to the variety of images that are available to audiences as resources for cultural imagination. 'Ideoscaples' are also "concatenations of images" but are defined more explicitly as political.

Appadurai uses the suffix -scape to describe how the world can appear rather stable like a landscape when seen from a particular perspective in spite of disjuncture and difference within and across the various flows of globalization. At the same time, the suffix -scape also allows Appadurai to point to the irregular shapes and deterritorialized movements of global flows as the work differently within and across different parts of the world.

Appadurai's theorization of the cultural experience of global flows in terms of disjuncture and difference within and across the various -scapes bears a striking resemblance to Williams's theory of the cultural experience of television flow in terms of the commercial breaks and interruptions within and across discrete programming units in broadcasting. However, unlike Williams who considers flow as a "planned" phenomenon of broadcasting, Appadurai considers flow as a deterritorialized phenomenon of globalization. This distinction, I would argue, has an important bearing on how we understand the role of globalization in television, and reciprocally, the role of television in globalization.

The globalization of traditionally national television industries and cultures, along with the digital convergence of broadcasting, cable, satellites, cell phones and the internet, has transformed the televisual landscape dramatically in recent decades. Much has been written about how audiences are experiencing an increasingly deterritorialized televisual landscape by imagining the world as a stable landscape build around a dynamic set of disjunctive but overlapping global flows. But little attention has been paid to the ways in which network executives around the world are working to re-territorialize the disjunctive flows of globalization, particularly since television flow is still a planned phenomenon as described by Williams. Here I am referring to new programming and scheduling strategies like simulcasting and multicasting being used by global networks to provide audiences with a seamless experience of television not only in relation to commercial interruptions but in also in relation to the overlapping and disjunctive flows of globalization.

For instance, when a major American broadcasting network like ABC, NBC or CBS simulcasts English programming in Spanish it is a strategic attempt to re-territorialize the global flows of migrant and immigrant ethnoscaples and bilingual mediascaples into the planned flow of television in the United States. Similarly, when major state-sponsored networks like CCTV in China or Doordarshan in India expand their services to reach diasporic audiences on satellite and cable channels around the world, it is a clear recognition of the growing influence of transnational ethnoscaples and technoscaples in

the globalization of their national cultures. When transnational music channels like MTV claim to provide a “360 degrees experience” by migrating from cable television to a digitally-convergent platform of TV+internet+cellphones, it is yet another example of a reterritorializing strategy that seeks to incorporate disjunctive global flows of youth culture into the planned flow of television culture.

In conclusion, I would argue the tension between the deterritorializing power of disjunctive global flows and the re-territorializing power of television networks to evolve new strategies for planned flows constitutes a central problematic for television and television studies in the global cultural economy.