

2012 Flow Position Paper

Roundtable: Representation in the Post-Network Era

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In this position paper, I offer two key ideas to think about/through.

The first has to do with the paradigm of the “post-network era” that shapes the concerns of this panel. From my research perspectives and interests which broadly are in the area of television in the US and the location of immigrants of color (specially South Asian immigrants), the paradigm of post-network is not the most useful to think about questions or politics of representation, membership, texts and audiences/users. As far as the politics of representing immigrants of color on television goes (South/Asian Americans for example), the post-ness of the networks have not been the most significant factor in shifting the terrain of immigrant representations. I would count several other factors such as the inroads made by Indian and South Asian satellite television channels, the growth of US based multicultural programming and the transnational diasporic television industrial contexts as far more influential and critical to rethinking the location of immigrants on the television/computer screen. Now, it is possible to claim that since all of the above shifts mentioned--- new technologies, new modes of distribution, choice and flexibility in viewing—are subsumed or covered under the phrase post-network era, immigrant satellite television would exemplify an expression of the diversity, fragmentation and choices available in this period. My take here is that instead of leaning towards a wide application of the phrase with its ‘era’ connotations, we might be better off revisiting the paradigm and see if it offers any nuance or does it rather reinforce a hegemonic view of imagined audiences/viewers/users in the US context?

My following reflections on the above question lead me to my second idea that I want to offer in this response paper. Can the currency of the phrase post-network era be related to the continuing investment (industrial, popular and intellectual in nature) in the nationalist logic of television? Such that even when we move the debate from network stranglehold over diverse publics to diverse sites to engage diverse publics, we are still implicitly wedded to some core imaginations about such publics and their national and racial identities?

For example, where would a discussion about the Asian Variety Show, a New York based television program that has been on air since the late 1980s—on public access stations, cable, satellite and now online as well—fit in relation to the post-network era and its unmarked other, the network era? The Asian Variety Show’s target audiences are South Asian immigrants. The program has since its inception mixed original programming produced locally in the US with syndicated content from India’s state owned and private channels. It airs on US cable stations that are marked as “public access” or international programming. More recently it has emerged on satellite channels and as online TV. Yet, it is important to note that the show Asian Variety show appears not on US satellite channels but on the South Asian international programming that

appears as 'ethnic' packages on DISH/DirectTV. The same goes for MTV Desi, a now-defunct satellite channel that was launched by MTVI networks to reach 'ethnic' multicultural viewers in the US, but was not available in the top 50 or 100 US channels. Made in the US, by US programming teams and for US audiences, the channel nevertheless was offered as an option in the International premium package for viewers. If US-based channels, Asian Variety Show and MTV Desi—both of them speaking for a community whose presence in the US dates back to the 1800s (with a more steady stream of immigration inaugurated by the 1965 immigration act) still needs to find their "rightful" place on international programming, can we read through such marginality an official historization of what counts under network and post-network television cultures? Does the marginal location of immigrant tv then not offer a space for a dialectical engagement with the problematics of dominant representations of US television histories? Can post-network era be deconstructed to reveal how even as the trope of network is being dismantled, the trope of nation and race underpinning the idea of the network has barely been interrogated?