

Other Television Histories

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Looking at the television industry within New Zealand provides an interesting snapshot of a post-colonial small nation with a particularly distinct national identity, but one which is no longer served by a traditional public service television broadcast space. Public Service Television in New Zealand has always held a contested position, with the state-owned television network being funded for many years both by a licence fee, and through advertising. This led to a dual remit where public service responsibilities and the requirement for ratings clashed uncomfortably. The removal of the licence fee in 1999 saw the government providing the network with a significant annual investment in order to fulfil their public service obligations, but also expecting a significant return on investment. The launch of digital transmission was seen as offering a space for public service television, with two public service digital channels being launched, however 5 years on, the new government is no longer prepared to fund a broadcast space within a time of austerity, and both spaces are now completely commercial. Interestingly, public service radio still exists, but there is growing concern that funding for that space might also be cut. However, these changes also allow for the possibility of innovative growth. Might the internet provide an alternate space for public service content to be made available? Are there concerns over availability, or a lack of visibility of such content?

The content that is currently available on New Zealand broadcast television provides an interesting view of global television more broadly, drawing on re-broadcast content from the US, the UK, Canada and Australia, in addition to locally produced content. Having this variety of content, including both network and cable content from the US, broadcast indistinguishably from each other across the schedule, means that much of the initial coding of the original broadcast is stripped out. Thus *United States of Tara* might screen directly after, and outrate *Glee*, something inconceivable within the US market. Removing content from its original broadcast context may allow us to think about elements which are inherent within the text, but which might be obscured by our assumptions of broadcast spaces. Do audiences view cable and network shows differently when extracted from those contexts? What happens to the brand identity of series when series from CBS, NBC and Showtime all air on the same network? Do we think about television differently when a single night's viewing on one network might screen content from four different national contexts?

A final element of television watching in New Zealand may allow us to reconsider what Tama Leaver calls the tyranny of digital distance. Broadcast models mean that international content often screens in New Zealand months, if not years, after its original broadcast. While this has traditionally not proved problematic, the rise of internet communication and transnational fan communities has made this type of delayed viewing increasingly fraught. New Zealand television networks are finally starting to respond to this, with one local network screening *Homeland* on free-to-air television in New Zealand less than three hours after it airs on the US west coast. This trend is also being seen with some US network content, as well as some UK cult series. The question that remains to be answered is whether this move begins to address some of the concerns that have existed, or whether viewers continue to exist in a state of temporal and geographic flux, unable to participate in live social media discussions, possibly excluding themselves from social media in order to avoid spoilers, often still unable to engage with elements of transmedia storytelling or overflow which are

still fixed to geographic location. Does this move discourage digital piracy of television content, or does it only address one small reason behind these actions?