

**A TOASTER WITH PICTURES:
the Evolution of American Broadcasting 1921-1991**

Monika Djerf Pierre

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1. UNDERSTANDING AMERICAN BROADCASTING

This paper describes the evolution of the American broadcasting system from the beginning of broadcasting in the 1900s up until the 1990s. The paper seeks to analyze how the institutions and content of radio and television have developed during this extensive time period, and to identify the major forces triggering and sustaining this development. The paper is based on a review of a number of seminal works on the history and development of radio and television in the United States.

The evolution of American broadcasting can be divided into three major phases, which I describe in the first section of the paper: The first phase, The age of radio (1920-1945), was the period of the formation of the American broadcasting system. All of the the major regulatory frameworks related to American broadcasting--both radio and television--were established in the beginning of this period. According to these frameworks, the airwaves were to be considered public property under national control. Regulating access to and utilization of them was perceived to be a legitimate role of government. Broadcasting stations were to be licensed by the Federal Radio Commission, FRC (later the Federal Communications Commission, FCC). Moreover, although privately owned and financially supported by advertising, stations were required to operate in accordance with "the public interest".

The second phase, The age of television (1946-1980), can be labeled the transformation years. This time period witnessed the existing radio-dominated system transforming into a, in many ways similar, system dominated by television. Essentially, the television system built on the existing radio structure. It inherited its regulations, its market structure, and much of its programming practices. Television can be said to successively have taken over radio's position as prime entertainer and news source in the American society, turning radio into a local, format-specialized supplement.

The third phase, The age of satellites and cable (1981-present), was a time of disintegration of the broadcasting system, which had been stable for a very long period of time. During this third phase, satellite transmitted programs distributed by cable challenged the existing broadcasting companies and exacerbated the media competition. Together with a new political philosophy of deregulation, where policy-makers essentially chose to treat broadcasting as any other business, the satellite/cable revolution triggered the disintegration of a broadcasting system whose market and ownership structure had been intact for nearly 30 years.

Even though important changes have happened to the system during the more than 70 years broadcasting have been known, there has also been a substantial continuity. In the second section of the paper I describe the three main characteristics of the American broadcasting system throughout the 20th century: (1) the fierce competition

within the broadcasting industry, dominated by a few powerful corporations; (2) the omnipresent commercialism; and (3) the strong domination of mass entertainment over news and information in programming.

Finally, in the third section of the paper, I discuss how four interdependent forces have been decisive in shaping American broadcasting: (1) Political forces, characterized by non-paternalism and laissez-faire, defining radio as a private, profit-making enterprise. "A toaster with pictures" is FCC chairman Mark Fowler's phrase, summing up his view on television, but it is also a good general description of American policy makers attitude towards broadcasting regulations: Television should be treated just like any other household utility, and government should interfere as little as possible with its programming practices; (2) Economic forces, including first the economy of scale that characterizes the broadcasting industry, which caused the programming oligopoly of the three major networks, and secondly the demands from advertisers, which made programming dominated by non-controversial, easily palatable, serialized entertainment, designed to capture an audience of millions; (3) Technological forces, featuring accelerating efficiency in technological development, brought about by an increasingly competitive media industry. This development made radio and television rapidly available and affordable to the general public, diffusing at a rate no other technological invention had experienced before; and (4) Social forces, most importantly the development of the consumerism of the American culture, facilitating rapid production and consumption of consumer goods through mass advertising. The consumer economy was the chief financial precondition of American broadcasting, and remains to date the soil in which American broadcasting grows.

1.1 The project

The development of broadcasting has been approached from a variety of different vantage points and different scientific perspectives. The amount of research on the subject is huge, especially with respect to the historical traditions. Just to give an example, although the bibliography in Sterling and Kittross' (1990) book contains about 600 entries, it is still referred to as a "selected" bibliography.

The vast majority of all the works on the history of broadcasting are structured chronologically. The authors describe the major events and issues as they evolve. True, this might seem to be the the most logical way to proceed since history, needless to say, unfolds in a chronological order. But, as many of the historical studies show, this design entails the major shortcoming of a loss of perspective. The chronological approach makes it difficult to see consistencies and trends. For these reasons, I have employed a different approach in this paper: a thematically structured analysis. In this design, I will first identify the most significant features of the American broadcasting system. Following that, I will identify the most important factors, or forces, shaping, changing and sustaining the system. Throughout the discussion about how these

forces have affected the broadcasting system, the key questions are: what have shaped the system, how and why did it happen, and what are the consequences?

This paper includes both works on the history and development of broadcasting in general as well as specialized studies of the development of certain aspects of the broadcasting system. It also contains studies from both of the two major traditions that have dealt with the evolution of radio and television, i.e., history and the social sciences. The most significant references in my study are Sterling and Kittross' (1990) *Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting*, Barnouw's (1990) *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, and Comstock's (1989) *The Evolution of American Television*. Most of the historical facts (such as dates, persons, events) in the description of the development are taken from these three books. Sterling and Kittross (1990) offer one of the most exhaustive historical descriptions of the evolution of radio and television in the United States to this date. Barnouw's (1990) book is also exhaustive, but deals only with television. Sterling and Kittross as well as Barnouw are rooted in the historical research tradition. A general description of the development of television from a social science perspective is provided by Comstock (1989).

To these general studies I have added several accounts of more specific issues and developments. Inglis (1990) focuses on the development of broadcasting technology and the broadcasting business that often are the key movers and shakers behind technological advances. Bliss (1991) provides a history of broadcast news. Similarly, Murray (1989) describes the evolution of television, focusing on the news and its societal role during different time periods. Furthermore, Hosley and Yamada (1987) present an historical account of women in broadcasting; Brooks and Marsh (1988) describe the trends in prime-time TV shows (and also provide a complete directory of prime-time television shows from 1946 to 1987); Whittemore (1990) describes the start of CNN by Ted Turner; Tiedge and Ksobiech (1987) analyze the strategies behind prime time programming, and Winston (1990) offers a theoretical discussion on how new media technologies are born.

Lichter et al (1991) analyse and describe the content of television shows since the 1950s. Thomas and Litman (1991) try to explain the start of the new Fox television network in the late 1980s. Rose (1985) describes the evolution of different TV genres, like the "sitcom", the soap opera, etc. Webster and Lichty (1991) focus their study on the development of audience research. Auletta (1991) describes the most recent development of the television networks, e.g., takeovers, budget cuts, new management, etc. Blum and Lindheim (1987) describe the principles behind network programming, Gitlin (1982) shows us how the networks make their programming decisions, and Papazian's (1991) analysis highlights the evolution and practices of commercial television.

2. RADIO, TV AND SATELLITES: THREE PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

The development of broadcasting in the United States can, broadly speaking, be divided into three phases. Each new phase was triggered by a major technological invention; first, the advent of the radio, then television, and finally satellites and cable technology. Each of these technologies came to revolutionize the existing media system.

2.1 Formation: The age of radio (1920-1945)

2.1.1 The first broadcasters

Prior to 1920, all broadcasting in the United States was experimental. Several inventors and companies started stations for experimental use with the technology of wireless transmission of voice and sound. This technology was called "radio telephony" or simply "radio". In 1920, the first non-experimental broadcasts intended for the general public began. The honor of being the first broadcast station in the U.S. has customarily been ascribed to the Pittsburgh station KDKA. It was created in 1920, when Westinghouse began to develop the idea of a potential market for radio receivers and subsequently invested in a radio broadcasting station to stimulate sales. The Department of Commerce assigned the call letters KDKA to the new station, which was run by Frank Conrad, a Westinghouse employee. Conrad had for several years run an experimental station from his home in Pittsburgh, PA. The Pittsburgh Post agreed to relay "news" to the station by telephone. The first broadcast--and indeed the first broadcast ever intended for the general public--took place when the station on November 2, 1920, broadcast the Cox - Harding presidential election returns.

Also in 1920, RCA (The Radio Company of America) began to develop the concept of a "Radio Music Box". This device was a manufactured radio receiver intended for the general public, providing music, talk, and entertainment to be received in the homes of millions of Americans. The idea of radio as a household utility was visualized by David Sarnoff, then general manager of the Radio Company of America, RCA. Sarnoff was later to become chairman of NBC (the National Broadcasting Company), which is the oldest American network. RCA had plans to become the main supplier of these radio receivers. RCA's first broadcasting facility, WDY, began broadcasting in 1921, at the General Electric Factory in New Jersey.

By the end of 1921, 30 broadcast stations were authorized. In the beginning of 1923, the number had risen to 576. Radio manufacturers and dealers (such as General Electric, RCA, and Westinghouse) controlled about 40 percent of the stations. Educational institutions and newspapers controlled 13 and 12 percent respectively, and department stores owned 5 percent of the stations. The first stations were operated as sidelines. The radio manufacturers opened up their stations where they had their research and manufacturing facilities (such as Schenectady for General Electric (GE),

and Pittsburgh for Westinghouse). Generally speaking, for most of the first broadcasters the radio station was not the main business venture. Instead, it was an ancillary to other business activities: they broadcast to promote sales of radio receivers (Sterling-Kittross 1990:62).

2.1.2 The beginning of networking

In 1923, using telephone lines, the telephone company AT&T began to link its stations into networks. The first link was established between WCAP in Washington and WEAJ in New York. Networking made it possible to broadcast the same program on a number of station in different areas simultaneously. Eventually, these networks would cover the entire continent, facilitating "coast-to-coast" broadcasts.

In 1926, The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) was founded, owned by RCA (50 percent), General Electric (30 percent), and Westinghouse (20 percent). NBC developed the first national radio network, and its business plans was to sell air time on local radio stations to sponsors, and to provide local stations with programming. When NBC was founded, it was agreed that the company would lease AT&T's telephone wires for networking. From the outset, the concept of networking was established as the same relationship between networks and affiliates, as it remains today. The general purpose of the networks was, and still is, to purchase time on radio stations, sell air time to advertisers, and to provide programming.

Due to government regulations against monopolization, no company was allowed to own more than five AM radio stations, and no more than one in the same market. This rule obstructed the development of "networks" of stations owned by a network company. However, the law did not outrule the possibility of providing programs to any number of stations. Hence, the networks developed a special mix of stations owned and operated by the networks (called O&Os) and affiliates (stations that are independently owned, but provided with programming by contract with a network).

In 1927, NBC witnessed the creation of its first network rival. The new network struggled and nearly went bankrupt, until it was bought by William S. Paley, a cigar manufacturer, in 1928. Paley would come to lead The Columbia Broadcasting System--CBS, as it became generally familiar as--until his retirement in 1983. Since the advertisers flocked around the increasingly successful NBC, CBS encountered severe initial financial problems. However, like NBC, CBS had a number of profitable O&Os--owned & operated stations-- which provided a stable and predictable income during the first difficult years.

In 1927, NBC had two national networks operating: the Blue network, fed by programs from station WJZ, and the Red network, fed by WEAJ, both located in New York.

ABC, the third network, was founded in 1943, when NBC under the antitrust laws was ordered to divest itself from one of its networks. NBC had put most of its quality programming and resources into the Red network, and decided to sell the Blue network. This network was purchased by Edward J. Noble--the creator of LifeSavers Candy-- and later changed its name to The American Broadcasting System, i.e., ABC.

All of these three networks--ABC, NBC and CBS--would later venture into television. The fourth radio network, Mutual, chose to remain exclusively in the radio business. It was created in 1934, when four major Eastern and Midwestern stations decided to make themselves available to advertisers at a group rate by connecting themselves by wire lines. Unlike CBS and NBC, Mutual did not originally have a central ownership with O & O stations and contractual affiliates. From the beginning, Mutual was a co-operative venture, but later expanded its domain to include several affiliates, mainly in the Midwestern states.

The networks held a firm grip on their affiliates. As programming costs increased it became increasingly important for individual stations to be affiliated with a network in order to remain competitive. The network epitomized economy of scale in programming, and could provide programs to local affiliate stations that would be far too expensive to produce for the individual stations. Independent stations had few other sources of programming than what they could afford to make themselves. In 1927, only 10 percent of the stations were affiliated with a network. Ten years later, 47 percent of the stations were network affiliates (17 percent with NBC, 16 percent with CBS, and 12 percent with Mutual). At the end of this period, in 1945, 95 percent of the stations were affiliated, 16 percent with NBC, 16 with CBS, 42 with Mutual, and 21 with ABC. Mutual's position was not as strong as its market share would suggest. At this time it was common for a station to be affiliated with more than one network, and the stations affiliated with Mutual were generally also affiliated with one of the major networks, using Mutual's programming mostly as fillers.

2.1.3 The radio revolution

In 1920, the first commercially manufactured radio sets became available, marketed through RCA. In 1922, only 0.2 percent of all households in the U.S. owned a radio set. In 1927, a radio existed in 24 percent of the homes and by 1945, this figure had risen to 88 percent. The years from 1922 to 1923 can be described as the radio boom. In 1922 there were only 30 radio stations operating, by the end of 1923 there were 556 stations on the air. By 1945 the number of station had increased to 981 (919 AM, and 54 FM). Radio had conquered the American society at a pace which no-one had imagined.

2.1.4 The basic principles of American broadcasting

The development of broadcasting in the 1910s and 1920s would be essential for how both radio and television later evolved. The basic principles that came to guide broadcasting during the years to come were established already during this initial phase. Several of the main actors in American broadcasting to this day established their position during these years, such as RCA (with regard to technological development and programming, as being radio manufacturer, and owner of the first network, NBC), AT&T (as a monopolistic provider of network wiring), GE and Westinghouse (in electronic manufacturing, and technological development), and the networks NBC, CBS, and ABC (in programming, and for CBS also with respect to technological development). Moreover, several of the regulatory decisions enforced now would remain largely stable over the years. *Interestingly, although the concept of broadcasting in general, and commercial broadcasting in particular, were not yet conceived, most of the regulations that came to regulate both radio and television were introduced already early in the 1920s. By the end of 1927, all of the major principles pertaining to American broadcasting -- both radio and television--were established.* According to this regulatory framework, the airwaves were to be considered public property, and regulating the use of them was considered a legitimate governmental function. Furthermore, broadcasting stations should be privately owned, but operating in the public interest, financially supported by advertising (although, of course, non commercial or educational stations were allowed), and licenced by the government through the FRC, the Federal Radio Commission (which later changed its name to the FCC, the Federal Communications Commission).

2.1.4.1 *The first principle: the airwaves are public property*

The first regulations of wireless radio communications were triggered by the need for international agreements on wireless transmissions for military and commercial use. Interference was a major problem even in point-to-point communication; the number of stations on the air often distorted communication. These problems were solved by several international conferences in the beginning of the 1900s. In the United States, Congress passed the Radio Act in 1912. The Radio Act was based on principles and policies derived from the provisions in the international agreements. The Radio Act of 1912, effective until 1927, regulated various forms of radio communication. The concept of radio in these years referred to point-to-point transmissions, mainly used in naval and commercial shipping. Multi-point radio transmission, or broadcasting, to the general public was not yet known.

The basic principle of the 1912 Radio Act (and the international agreements on wireless communication) was that the electromagnetic spectrum is public property and that regulation of its usage is a legitimate function of government (Inglis 1990:45). The

Act outruled any radio station operating without a licence from the Secretary of Commerce. However, government agencies had no authority to assign frequencies to stations. Since the number of stations increased rapidly, and also since they ever so often changed frequencies and increased their transmitting power at their own discretion, the situation soon became intolerable. Interference often obstructed good reception.

To bring order into this chaos, the Congress passed the Radio Act of 1927, which made the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) responsible for assigning frequencies to stations. In 1934, under President Roosevelt, the Communications Act was passed to put the regulation of wired and wireless communications under the control of one single agency. It created the seven-member (reduced to five in 1986) Federal Communications Commission (FCC), with the authority to regulate all communications systems, except those operated by the federal government. The provisions of the 1934 Act did not differ greatly from those in the 1927 Act.

2.1.4.2 *The second principle: privately owned radio*

Prior to World War I, the vast majority of radio stations in the United States were controlled by the American branch of the British Marconi company, which at that time had established almost a worldwide monopoly in wireless telegraphy technology. When the U.S. entered the World War I in 1917, all radio stations in the U.S., including those controlled by foreign companies, were placed under government control. The U.S. Navy then used wireless telephony with great success throughout World War I.

The war years made the military realize the potential and extreme importance of wireless communications systems for defence purposes. Inspired by its achievements during the war the Navy, with the support from several political groups, proposed a *monopoly in radio*, supervised by the Navy. The arguments for government control over radio were many, and indeed, a political proposal with that effect had been submitted to the Congress even before the war. Arguments in favor of this system included "the sometimes destructive competition between rival telegraph and telephone companies, the monopolistic trend in each field of communications due largely to economies of scale,././, the Navy experiences during the war, and the example of many European countries" (Sterling and Kittross 1990:51).

The Alexander bill, as the proposition became known, was fiercely opposed by several groups. First, there were strong overall objections to the Navy as the suggested guardians of the ether. Secondly, the Republican sweep in the election and the strong view held by many Americans against monopolies in general and government control in particular made the proposition politically impossible. Third, the radio amateurs were fighting violently for the return of their stations from Navy control. Fourth, and

probably most importantly, there were violent resistance and lobbying from the powerful corporations already in the business related to wireless (AT&T, Marconi etc.).

Thus, the failure of the Alexander bill established a second fundamental principle in American broadcasting: radio should be privately owned and controlled.

2.1.4.3 The third principle: radio under national control

When the plans for a Navy monopoly in radio were discarded, the Navy reassessed its strategies. Their insights on the significance of radio communications for the military triggered their strong opposition against returning the radio stations they had controlled during the war to private interests, and also against allowing foreign interests to regain control of important parts of the American communications system. If a government monopoly was impossible, then a private, domestic, "monopoly" was to be preferred to foreign control; the communications system should be owned and controlled by a private corporation over which the United States government (and the U.S. Navy) could exert significant influence.

Negotiations were initiated with General Electric (GE, one of the major electronic manufacturers in the U.S. and a reliable supplier of military electronic equipment). The parties agreed that GE should start a new company in the radio communications business, The Radio Company of America (RCA), which was forever to remain under American control. Realizing that the United States never would let the British Marconi company resume their influence over American wireless communications, the British Marconi could do nothing but agree on the terms presented to them by the American government. GE purchased American Marconi's assets and the stockholders received RCA shares in exchange for their Marconi shares. This was the background to the foundation of The Radio Company of America (RCA) in 1919, a process which established a third major principle in American broadcasting: radio should be under national control.

2.1.4.4 The fourth principle: local stations

The licence to use the airwaves was from the beginning given to the owner of the local radio station. He was made legally responsible for what the station transmitted. However, the concept of "radio station" was established before multi-point broadcasting was known. The early radio stations were used only for point-to-point transmissions. But later, when multi-point broadcasting was developed, it became controlled by the same regulatory framework. Since the technology of networking was yet to be developed at that time, it was assumed that a radio station would transmit locally produced programs within a limited area. This area was soon defined as a "local

market" for that station. The idea of simultaneous coast-to-coast broadcasting and the possibility of a nationwide audience were not yet conceived.

Furthermore, since programming was assumed to originate from locally owned radio stations, and because somebody must be legally responsible for the stations programming, the entire legal system of licensing was related to the local stations. The broadcasting station soon became expected to be an integrated part of the community. Indeed, one of the key questions concerning a station's performance as its licence was considered for renewal referred to to what extent the station had served its community, or its local market, with community oriented programs.

The principle of localism also dominated the regulations pertaining to ownership issues and market concentration. Thus, the entire framework of antitrust laws prohibiting the development of monopolies and distorted markets was enforced at the local level. Nobody could own more than 7 AM radio stations, 7 FM radio stations and 7 television stations, and they also had to be in different markets (initially, the legal maximum was set to five stations).

2.1.4.5 *The fifth principle: commercial radio*

When the basic technological and regulatory framework pertaining to radio were established, the broadcasting business had to face another important problem: the rising cost of program production. The question about how to finance the production of programs soon became acute. Amazingly, when you look at the extent of commercialism in American broadcasting today, *advertising was from the beginning not considered appropriate for radio*. A number of influential radio pioneers, including Sarnoff, objected to broadcast advertisements on the basis that it was "unseemly". Secretary of Commerce Hoover stated that broadcasting advertisements was "unthinkable" (Inglis 1990:66). RCA's David Sarnoff supported a proposal that called for a tax on each set to provide operating funds for a central broadcasting organization, not unlike the system that many European countries were adopting (Barnouw 1990:43). Sarnoff saw radio as a nonprofit "public service"; his first priority was to sell radios, which RCA manufactured (Auletta 1991:30).

However, in 1922 AT&T launched the idea of what they called "toll broadcasting", which essentially meant sponsored or advertiser supported programming. The same year WEAJ, an AT&T owned station, broadcast its first revenue-generating program, a 10-15 minutes long commercial for an apartment house in Jackson Heights in New York City. The telephone company AT&T made the analogy to long distance telephone service (called toll service), which at that time was the sole responsibility of AT&T. "Toll broadcasting" would make broadcasting an exclusive right for AT&T, although the company did not plan to produce programs, but rather to sell air time to any one who would like to use the airwaves.

However, AT&T's de facto monopolizing broadcasting was politically and economically impossible. Following a fierce legal battle with its competitors and government agencies, AT&T decided to abandon broadcasting all together. They sold their broadcasting facilities to RCA, but settled an agreement that made AT&T responsible for providing the wiring for network radio (and later also television). Nevertheless, the idea of sponsored programming had now become accepted, and the fifth major principle of American broadcasting--radio supported by advertising--was established.

Radio became the accepted medium for mass advertising as early as in 1928 (Sterling and Kittross 1990:112). By then coast-to-coast network could cover 80 percent of the nation's homes (although only 30 percent had receivers). By now, radio receivers had become less expensive, potential advertisers and national advertising agencies had recognized radio's potential, and the first scientific radio listening research was underway (which could convince potential advertisers of radio's extensive reach).

2.1.4.6 *The sixth principle: serving the "public interest"*

In the mid-1920s, as the chaos in the air was becoming an increasing problem, Congress--in an effort to ameliorate the situation--used the Radio Act of 1927 to make the Federal Radio Commission (the FRC) responsible for assigning frequencies to stations. The Radio Act was proposed much on the industry's initiative. For once, the government dealt with an industry "begging to be regulated". Because the number of aspiring broadcasters were much greater than the number of stations that could be provided space in the electromagnetic spectrum, the FRC had to use some criterion when choosing between competing applicants. The Radio Act then stipulated that the license should be given to the one that best could serve the "public interest, convenience or necessity". However, the Radio Act also forbade FRC to act as censor. The enforcement of the principles should be applied when the stations licence came up for renewal, not in day-to-day decisions. But in the Radio Act of 1927, FCC did not specify what serving the public interest actually referred to, something which would cause future controversies. Indeed, to this day many argue that the public service principle remains largely undefined.

2.2 Transformation: The age of broadcast television (1945-1980)

2.2.1 A television system built on the radio structure

The second phase of the development of American broadcasting was a period of "transformation". Even though the development of television revolutionized the American society, the most significant feature of the emerging television system was that it to a large extent drew on the structure of the radio system. It inherited radio's

regulative principles, its market structure, its owners, much of its programming practices, and, of course, its audience. Gradually, television began to take over radio's functions as prime mass entertainer and news supplier, redefining radio as a local, format-specialized medium with a totally new and different position in the media system.

2.2.2 The first telecasters: the networks

In 1939, with the formal opening of NBC's television, broadcast television was introduced in the U.S. Television sets manufactured by RCA then went on display. At this time, however, broadcasts were only experimental. Since the technological standards for the television technology were still to be established, commercial broadcasting was not legal. Trying to put pressure on decision-makers on the issue of TV standards and also to get an edge in the competition (mainly CBS and its associates), RCA's David Sarnoff strongly pushed for the start of commercial television.

The technological development of television was made by the same companies that were leading in the radio business. RCA (the owners of NBC) and CBS were the main competitors in the research and development of television technology. Between 1936 and 1941, the battle over television standards was intensified. The two main competitors had both developed a television system of their own that they tried to get FCC to recognize as the technological standard for the U.S.. RCA wanted to start with a monochrome system, while CBS wanted to pursue the idea of having color television as standard from the start. Eventually, RCA won the fight, mainly because CBS' system suffered from severe quality problems and was also technically inferior to RCA's technology.

Generally speaking, the first television stations were started by people who already owned a local radio station in that market. The key to success in television was to control a successful and profitable radio business. First, the profits from the radio business could sustain the television business during the first difficult years, when most stations lost money. Secondly, owning a radio station meant having a pool of technical competence and personnel, which could later be transferred to television. Indeed, most of the people who started to work in television were radio stars that moved to the new medium.

As used to be the case with radio, most of the programming aired on the stations were provided by one of the major networks. NBC (first), CBS (second), and ABC (last), all tried to build a television network business based on the same principles of O&Os and affiliates that had become the trade-mark of their radio businesses. NBC lead the competition, followed by CBS. ABC had severe initial problems, mainly because it did not have a flagship New York station, from which to originate programming. Instead it

relied on other companies' facilities to give its technicians programming experience (Brooks and Marsh 1988:xii).

For some time, there was also a fourth television network on the market. Until it folded in 1956, DuMont tried to compete with the other three networks. Unlike these, however, DuMont did not have a radio network as a base, which is probably the most important reason why it failed.

In May 1940, 23 stations were reported to conduct telecasting in the U.S. (Barnouw 1990:92). Throughout the 1940s, New York was America's TV "capital". It was the first city with more than one TV station operating, and it had by far the largest number of sets in people's homes (Books and Marsh 1988:xi). During this first period, most television programs during this first period could only be viewed in New York city. Nonetheless, the possibility of networking was pursued from the beginning. Thus, in 1936, AT&T laid the first coaxial cable connecting Philadelphia and Washington. This was the first step towards television networking.

Commercial television saw the light of day in 1941, when both NBC and CBS were granted commercial licences for their New York stations (Brooks and Marsh 1988:xi). But just as commercial television was becoming established, World War II put a halt to the development. Indeed, very little was broadcast during the war. The war economy forestalled the manufacturing of television equipment. Instead, radio flourished during the war years, positioning itself both as the main entertainment and news source for the American public. Also, the war years meant the breakthrough for women in broadcast journalism (Hosely and Yamada 1987). Many of the war correspondents, women and men, would establish their position in broadcasting during these years, and many would also transfer to television after the war was ended.

After the war everything started anew. The diffusion of television was indeed revolutionary. In 1946 8 000 television sets were sold (mainly in New York). In 1951 23 percent of the U.S. households had television, and in 1960 television was in 87 percent of the households. In 1981 television reached the 98 percent level, where it still remains today. Meanwhile, the number of television stations soared at the same pace as television spread among the American public. In 1949, 51 television stations were operating. In five years (1954) that number had increased to 354 television stations. By the late 1980s the number of TV stations had reached almost 1 400.

2.2.3 Radio transforms

What happened to radio when television expanded? Contrary to what might be expected, radio advertising revenues did not decrease, but increased. What happened was that national advertising provided through the networks fell drastically, while at the

same time local advertising increased dramatically. As a result, national networks lost their grip on the stations, and radio acquired a new platform in the media system as a local, format-specialized medium.

It was during the 1950s that the first radio "formats" emerged. That a station has a certain "format" indicates that it specializes in one (or a few) type of programming: all news, all country music, all classical music, etc. The first format that evolved was the "musical clock radio" (Sterling and Kittross 1990:275). This format is based on music, weather, time checks, news on the hour, and commercials. Later the Contemporary Hits/Top 40, the Urban/Black, the Beautiful Music, and many other formats developed.

The audience's use of radio decreased by almost 50 percent from 1950 to 1955, but then the trend reversed. Indeed, by the beginning of the 1980s, the average household's use of radio was almost three and a half hours, compared to four and a half hours in the beginning of the thirties. Thus, radio had found a "new" audience, in the sense that it had become an important complement to television. People were using radio in a new way.

There are several reasons to account for this transition. Most important was probably the break-down of the barriers to the use of recorded music in programming (initially the FCC prohibited the playing of records; radio was supposed to be live), which made the "format radio" possible. Secondly, there was the invention of the transistor, which made radio portable (people could listen to radio in cars, or on the beach), and the technological development in production, which made radio relatively cheap to produce and economically manageable for a small, local radio station.

2.3 Disintegration: The age of satellite/cable television (1980- present)

The media system that evolved after television was introduced would remain relatively stable for more than 30 years. No major change occurred in the regulative structure, nor in the industry. Owned by the same owners as before, the networks continued to compete over the audience's attention, providing essentially the same programming fare of entertainment in various forms as they did in the early days of television. However, in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, a new technological revolution was under way: satellite transmission and cable distribution of television.

2.3.1 The satellite/cable revolution

Certainly, neither cable television nor satellites were new phenomena in the 1980s. Cable distribution of television channels had been known since the 1950s, when it was utilized to provide television to remote locales that had difficulties receiving broadcast signals, because of their topographical situation, like for instance the mountainous region of Pennsylvania. Satellites had been used since the 1960s to transmit television

signals around the world. But it was not until the late 1970s and the early 1980s that the revolutionary potential of the combination of satellite transmission and cable distribution of programs was realized. Cable television, or more accurately "satellite-transmitted cable-distributed" television, was then not a "new medium", only a new means of distributing television signals. Nevertheless, it revolutionized the whole broadcasting system.

Two new television services were offered through the emerging cable systems: (1) Pay-TV services (such as Home Box Office, American Movie Classics, etc.) for which the subscriber pays an extra -- relatively expensive -- premium, and (2) basic services, which can include "superstations" (originally "normal" broadcast stations that now cover the entire country by satellite, like WTBS from Atlanta, WGN from Chicago, WOR from New York and WPIX from New York), and "pure" satellite channels devoted to news (CNN), sports (ESPN), music (MTV), childrens programming (Nickelodeon), ethnic programming (Galavision in spanish, BET- the Black Entertainment Network), and entertainment (The Family Channel, Nostalgia channel etc.). The suppliers of basic services receive their income from advertising and a modest per-subscriber fee.

In 1970 only 8 percent of the American households had access to cable television, and 90 percent of the systems offered less than 12 channels to their subscribers. It was during the 1980s that both the numbers of cable subscribers and the number of receivable channels soared. In 1981, 22 percent of the households had access to cable, and more than 35 percent had access to more than 12 channels. By 1990, the number of cable subscriber households had more than doubled; more than fifty percent now had access to cable and of those, 70 percent received more than 12 channels.

There are two reasons why the super-stations and the satellite channels can be successful. The first is that they are "lean and mean". CNN, for instance, manages to provide news 24 hours a day, with only a third of the budget of a major network news department like CBS. Also, CNN does not pay their anchors million dollars salaries. Moreover, the main competitive advantage of the new competitors relates to their distribution. Because these channels are distributed by cable, they do not have to rely on advertising as the only source of income. Although small, subscriber fees account for a substantial amount of the satellite channels' revenues. CNN's owner Ted Turner says that the good thing about CNN is that "we can live with a .5 or .6 rating. Not a five, but a point five. That kind of numbers that would get you fired in five minutes" (if you were working for a network). (quoted in Wittemore 1990:305).

2.3.2 A fourth commercial network: Fox

The eighties did not only give birth to a number of satellite distributed channels, it also witnessed the emergence of a new broadcast network--Fox Broadcasting System. Fox Network was started in 1986 by Rupert Murdoch, and was the first successful start of a broadcast (over the air) network since ABC was founded in 1943. It started out small, programming only on weekends, but expanded in 1992 its programming to seven days a week. Fox now has several shows on air that even can compete with the shares of the old networks (Married With Children, The Simpsons).

Fox's success is puzzling considering the increasing media competition during the recent years; the late 1980s might seem like the worst possible time to enter the television market. Thomas and Litman (1991) argue that Fox's success can be attributed to the breakdown of several major regulatory and economical barriers which previously had prevented attempts to establish viable new networks. One such barrier was the FCC's station allocation plan. The FCC had effectively limited the number of networks when it, as means to solve the scarcity and interference problems associated with broadcasting, restricted the number of over-the-air, VHF, commercial stations receivable by a community to *three*. FCC regulation thus created a structural barrier to entry which essentially assured the dominance of the network oligopoly. Although the FCC did not alter its station allocation plan, several policies and conditions changed, enabling a new network to overcome the technical and coverage handicaps. For instance, carriage by cable reduced the technical handicap considerably, since cable systems could import and distribute a considerable number of distant channels.

In addition to the government policy barrier, there were also substantial economic barriers to entry, most of them associated with economies of scale. The old networks had an extensive lineup of affiliated stations, and nearly universal access to the audience, which gave them an extreme cost advantage vis-à-vis Fox. But the economic preconditions for a new network also changed in the late 1980s. In 1985 the multiple station ownership rule was increased from seven to twelve. This meant a greater possible base of stations owned by one network. Murdoch invested a part of his huge fortune and bought the former Metromedia Group television stations in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Dallas, Washington and Houston. The company also had considerable broadcasting and programming experience and expertise. In addition to purchasing the Metromedia stations and securing contracts from numerous affiliates, Murdoch also owned Twentieth Century Fox's film and television studios, including its library of lucrative films and television properties, such as M*A*S*H. Murdoch was the first to own both a film/television studio and a distribution system for programming

2.3.3 The losing networks

The number of programming sources in the United States is expanding. Prior to the 1980s, almost all stations were affiliated with one of the three networks, and received most of their programming from them. The few independent stations did not provide much local or original programming, but filled most of their time with reruns of old network shows, which means that the networks indirectly provided their programming as well.

The most obvious effect of the cable revolution for the audience was the dramatic increase in the number of receivable channels. In 1950 the average household in the U.S. could choose from 4 television channels, in 1989 the number had increased to over 30 (Webster and Lichty 1991:168). As people were offered more choices of programming, the networks began to find it increasingly difficult to keep their audience. The trend is that the networks are losing their grip on both the television stations and the American people. In 1948, 100 percent of the television stations were affiliated with one of the networks (56 percent with NBC, 19 percent with CBS, and 38 percent with ABC - multiple affiliations were common). In 1967 88 percent were affiliated (34 percent with NBC, 31 percent with CBS, and 23 percent with ABC), and in 1987 only 61 percent of the stations were affiliated with one of these networks (21 percent with NBC, 18 percent with CBS and 22 percent with ABC). The audience shares for the networks have decreased in a similar way (Sterling and Kittross 1990). In 1976-77 91 percent of the audience watching television during primetime had their sets tuned in to one of the networks. In the season 1988-89 the networks share was down to 64 percent (Webster and Lichty 1991:169).

Thus, the networks faced diminishing audiences and decreasing profits. The financial difficulties weakened all the networks, and caused a series of take-overs in the mid-eighties. In 1984, ABC was taken over by Capital Cities. In 1985, NBC was swallowed by General Electric. Since it was GE that founded NBC in 1926 this means that the company again after 60 years had returned to its original owner. Finally, in 1986, CBS was bought by Lawrence Tisch and his Loews Corporation (the development before and after the take-overs are described by Auletta 1991).

The new owners kept a close eye on the bottom line. Budget cuts and layoffs, especially hard on the news departments, were ordered at all three networks. Hundreds of employees were fired. This led to severe conflicts within the network organizations, were the staff often felt that that the new owners had betrayed the public trust that network television worked for (Auletta 1991:340):

The same struggles between public versus shareholder responsibility, the same almost religious conflict between old and new values tore at each network. What was different was the way each battle was fought. CBS engaged in a full-fledged public war in which Larry Tisch was left bloodied and the casualties were chronicled in the press. ABC's was a quiet skirmish, attracting little notice, even though the new owners would slash their News budget as deeply as Tisch did. The battle at NBC was neither as loud as at CBS nor as quiet as at ABC.

The conflict within CBS was the loudest, and it even was fought on air on its own news program, as CBS News anchor Dan Rather argued in a newscast (Auletta 1991:332):

Our new chief executive officer, Laurence Tisch, told us when he arrived that he wanted us to be the best. We want nothing more than to fulfill that mandate. Ironically, he has now made the task seem something between difficult and impossible. I have said before that I have no intentions of participating in the demise of CBS. But do the owners and officers of the new CBS see news as a trust... or only as a business venture?

From an economical point of view, the new owners probably were right in cutting down the network organizations. The networks were "fat"; they were built during the golden years, when profits were soaring and when the only competition was to expect from the other two network colleagues. To survive in the new competitive environment, significant changes had to be implemented. But the new owners were not very subtle when enforcing their new policies. They also did not realize that for many people the networks were not just any company, but a public service that could not be run by the same principles any other type of business.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AMERICAN BROADCASTING SYSTEM

3.1 Competition

Ever since the early days of radio broadcasting, fierce competition within the broadcasting industry has been one of the key characteristics of the broadcasting system.

3.1.1 The technological race

In the early years of broadcasting, competition was mainly about achieving technological superiority. Controlling the patents of the inventions in radio technology was crucial in the race for technological achievements, which in turn would create

economic advantages over the competitors and market domination. Inglis (1990) offers an excellent description of the numerous patent litigations, often between inventors and their financial backers, that marked this period. These incidents during the experimental years of broadcasting highlight the significant step between a genial invention -- the actual development of a new technology -- and an innovation -- the successful introduction of a new technology on the market. The "genious" inventor often lacked financial insights and business sense, which made him extremely susceptible to exploitation (Armstrong, the inventor of FM radio, even committed suicide after a lengthy battle with RCA). The successful inventors during this period had reliable business partners and a solid financial backing.

3.1.2 The network race: capturing the audience

When radio was introduced on the market, competition heated up several degrees. Moreover, the nature of the competition also changed, and became increasingly centered around capturing the audience. Competition started in the local market, between local stations. However, since almost all the stations were affiliated with one network, the competition soon developed into a race between the three networks NBC, CBS, and ABC.

Initially, in radio, NBC had a formidable lead. In television, CBS became the leader, with ABC trailing behind the other two competitors. In the 1970s, the competition went from tough to fierce when ABC, through clever programming under Fred Silverman, managed to capture the young, urban audience that was attractive to advertisers, and got on top in the ratings race.

3.1.3. Competition in the 1990s: fighting for survival

In the late 1980s, the nature of competition changed once again, becoming even stronger. The networks now not only had to face the competition from each other, but also from the numerous new satellite channels, the "superstations", and on top of all that a new network, Fox. An indicator of this increasing competition is that the "discard rate", i.e., the percentage of network shows that not are renewed after its first season, is increasing steadily (Gitlin 1983:54-55). For a variety of reasons, this is considered a big problem. One is that it takes time for a new show to develop its audience. Many of the extremely popular shows, like M*A*S*H and Cheers, needed several years to reach the top in the ratings race. Indeed, it is quite possible that many of the new, good shows never will get the chance to win the heart of the audience.

Another problem relates to the ever increasing cost of program production. With decreasing profit margins, producers tend to use the well approved and known programming formulas, instead of putting their efforts into new, innovative

productions. Comstock argues:

Television operates like a game in which each player's return takes precedence over the total return to all players. There is an inevitable narrowing and homogenization of what is offered, coupled with the frequent head-to-head scheduling of the mediums starships of greatest interest. The system thus ignores millions, yet squanders its best programming (Comstock 1989:32).

Still, most people watch one of the three traditional networks every night. However, having lost one third of its audience the networks face severe problems. It is little comfort that the new channels also have a tough time and that many of them have red figures. The golden days when profits were soaring are gone. Competition in the 1990s essentially seems to develop not so much into a race for greatest profits as a struggle for survival.

3.2. Commercialism

Radio and television stations receive their revenues from the sales of commercial time. The extent of the commercialism, its seemingly complete insaturation, is the second characteristic of the American system. Commercials regularly interrupt programs, and no program is considered too serious not to be cut in pieces by "messages from the sponsors". Since both radio and television are vehicles for advertisers, the programming is also heavily influenced by the advertiser's demands.

3.2.1 History: from owning the shows to spot advertising

Although radio was commercial almost from the beginning, its most aggressively commercialized period started during World War II (Barnouw 1990:73). This then led to growing protests against radio's commercialization. Educators, churchmen, and labor leaders called for the cancellation of all licences and their reassignment. The networks responded by introducing several "public service" programs and by expanding their news and public affairs schedule.

In the beginning of radio advertising, advertisers produced the shows and sold them to the networks. The name of the show often contained the name of its sponsor: Gillette's Cavalcade of Sports, the Camel News Caravan, the Ford Theatre are examples. The shows then contained what was believed to be a suitable mix of entertainment or news (to make the program interesting enough for the audience to watch it), and "messages" from the sponsor. Later on, as programming costs rised, sponsors stopped producing shows themselves. Instead, the networks became responsible for the production. Multiple sponsors for a show, and the buying of "spots" (one minute, later 30 and 15 seconds, segments) of air time on the shows, became the normal pattern.

3.2.2 The non commercial alternative: fighting for air

There are some non-commercial alternatives in both radio and television, mainly provided through the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). PBS can in many ways be referred to as the fourth national network (or fifth, if you count Fox). However, although "educational" or public broadcasting was established already early in the 1920s, it has never managed to attract more than a tiny audience. In television, the PBS stations normally have a share of three percent of the audience, as compared to around 20 for each of the commercial networks.

The public broadcasting stations receive their revenues partly from government funds, partly from membership fees, pledges, and donations. The lack of financial resources is the most difficult problem for the non-commercial stations. Another problem is related to the poor co-ordination and agreement on what service the public broadcasting stations should provide: education, public service, minority programming, entertainment (but of better quality) or perhaps all of the above? PBS's programming varies considerably between stations; Public Affairs programs, quality childrens programs (Sesame Street and Mr Rogers Neighborhood), foreign quality serials and movies (normally British productions like Fawly Towers and Emmerdale Farm), and news are routine parts of their schedule. However, not even PBS provides a news program during primetime (The MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour is aired between 7 and 8 pm).

3.3 Mass entertainment

The third characteristic of the American broadcasting system is related to its programming: there is an extreme dominance of mass entertainment in serial form. A quick look at the programming schedule during primetime for the years 1963-1985 for all three commercial networks together (Table 1) shows that the Situation Comedy ("sitcoms") has constituted more than one third of all the network programs on primetime, and that news and public affairs only make up for 3 percent of the aired programs. This means that various types of fiction and entertainment occupies 97 percent of the television schedule.

Table 1 Prime-time programs 1963-1985 (percent) on ABC, NBC and CBS, and their "popularity" (their rank in the ratings: 1 is the genre with highest average ratings and 10 the genre with lowest average ratings)

Category	Percent of shows on prime-time	Ratings (rank)	
Movies	10	2	
News/information/talk	3	10	(least popular)
Sports	1	3	
Quiz/Game	2	8	
Situation Comedy	33	1	(most popular)
Variety	11	4	
Science Fiction	2	9	
Mystery/Suspense	7	6	
Action/Adventure	16	7	
Drama	15	5	
Total	100	N= 2083	

Source: Tiedge and Ksobiech (1987:49). Prime-time is the time between 8 pm and 11 pm. Examples: Movies (ABC Monday Night Movie, CBS Tuesday Night Movie), News/information/talk (60 Minutes, 20/20), Sports (ABC NFL Monday Night Football), Quiz/Game (64 000\$ Question), Situation Comedy (I Love Lucy, The Cosby Show, M*A*S*H, The Beverly Hillbillies, All In the Family, Happy Days), Variety (Texaco Star Theatre, The Red Skeleton Show, The Ed Sullivan Show), Science Fiction (Star Trek), Mystery/Suspense (Murder, She Wrote, Perry Mason), Action/Adventure (Starsky and Hutch, Miami Vice), Drama (Dallas, Falcon Crest, LA Law, 90210).

3.3.1 History: from Vaudeville to Relevance Drama

Already from its early days, radio concentrated its programming on various types of entertainment. In 1938 the most common program forms in evening radio were Musical Variety Shows, Concert Music, Vaudeville/Comedy, and Thrillers (drama). Daytime radio programming for the same year featured almost half of its time with womens serials (soap operas). Early television was dominated by Vaudeville-like variety shows, like Milton Berle's Texaco Star Theatre and The Ed Sullivan Show, and situation comedies (Brooks and Marsh 1988:xiv).

Many of the television genres, or formats, that we still see on television today were first developed for radio. Examples include the quiz show, the variety show (music mixed with other sorts of entertainment), the documentary, the situation comedy (the sitcom), the womens serial (the soap opera), and the western. Thus, television inherited much of radio's programming practices. The genres were translated to television, and adapted to the new medium's possibilities.

The program formats were developed to be suitable for advertising. This first meant 15 minutes programs surrounded and interrupted by commercials. Later, in television, the standard format was stretched to 30 minutes. In the 1960s, even 60 minutes and 120 minutes formats became common. Through the years the situation comedy (the sitcom) has been a pillar supporting both radio (in the early days before the birth of the local, format radio) and television. A sitcom is typically a half-hour comedy series focused on episodes involving recurring characters within the same premise. The episodes are finite (they are solved at the end of each show); the sitcom opens up each episode with "situation normal status quo", then the "problem" or "conflict" for this episode is presented, which is happily solved at the end of the show (the "happy ending") (Mintz 1985:115).

However, the overall continuity of programming practices over the years does not indicate that there has been no change in programming over time. During the late 1980s and early 1990s some new genres have been developed, such as the "real life drama" (Hill Street Blues and LA Law for instance), the "tabloid news shows" (Hard Copy, A Current Affair), and the "dramatic documentaries" (Cops, Rescue 911). At the same time, other genres have gone extinct, like the western, which peaked during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Most of the changes in programming, however, have been conducted *within the existing genres*. The situation comedy of the 1950s, like Lucille Ball's crazy house wife in The Lucy Show, was completely different from these of later years, like the Cosby Show or A Different World. The genres have been adapted to contemporary values and present social conditions.

Table 2. Evening programming (6pm-) on commercial networks 1949, 1959, 1969, 1979 and 1988 (percent)

Year	1949	1959	1969	1979	1988
Variety	27	20	19	10	1
General drama	7	10	4	18	17
Movie	11	13	15	16	17
Action/adventure	0	6	9	11	4
Crime/detective	1	10	11	12	26
Western	0	18	11	1	0
Sitcom	1	8	12	16	17
Quiz/panel	4	2	3	1	0
News/inform.	15	10	2	15	18
Other	34	3	14	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100
N= (hours per week)	82	87	91	85	77

Source: Sterling and Kittross (1990:650-651).

Table 2 shows the evening programming on commercial networks in the years 1949, 1959, 1969, 1979 and 1988.

The most obvious trends shown in the table is the decline of the variety show, and the rise and fall of the westerns. The table reports only evening shows programmed by the networks. When the networks are off air, its local station affiliate is in charge of the programming. However, during the evening the networks provide all the programming during primetime (8pm -11 pm), and the bulk of programming during the other hours too (the network news shows at 6.30 and 11 pm, etc). Other programs shown during the evening include local news produced by the local station, (30 minutes to an hour between 6 and 7 pm) and syndicated shows (usually aired between 7 and 8 pm, before primetime). The quiz and game shows (such as Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy) are often made in syndication (bought from independent producers for simultaneous broadcasting on a number of stations), as are a number of talk-shows.

4. THE SHAPING FORCES: POLITICS, ECONOMICS, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE AUDIENCE

Most of the research on the development of American broadcasting has been conducted in the historical tradition. Historians generally deal with development in a chronological order, emphasizing the significance of single, unique events in the course of history, and focusing on the importance of actions of powerful individuals in explaining course of events. Social science studies of the development of broadcasting (cf. for instance Comstock 1989) have a totally different approach than historical studies. They tend to focus on the general characteristics of and trends in the development (sometimes at the risk of generalizing too hard), emphasizing structural forces over individual actions when explaining media evolution.

Most of the literature on the history of American broadcasting lack any elaborate discussion of what factors, or forces, in general contribute to shape a media system. Since the purpose of this study was to identify and analyze the forces behind the development of broadcasting in the U.S., I had to take the other authors' discussions as a point of departure, and, based on their arguments, try to identify the forces that have been decisive in the evolution.

My overall conclusion is that their discussion deals with four, major, interdependent forces, that have been decisive in the development: Political forces (related to the regulators of broadcasting), Economic forces (related to the broadcasting business), Technological forces, and Social forces (related to the audience). In the final part of the paper I will discuss how and with what consequences these forces have impacted on the broadcasting system.

4.1 The political forces: regulating broadcasting

4.1.1 The FCC: from a "vast wasteland" to a "toaster with pictures"

The government agency responsible for regulating broadcasting is the FCC, the Federal Communications Commission. Over the years, FCC has shown a strong reluctance to exercise its regulative powers, interfering only when it was deemed unavoidable. The modus operandi of the Commission has mostly been characterized by reaction rather than anticipation. Whenever the government has interfered with the broadcasting business it has often been as a response to a chaotic situation (as in 1948 when the FCC issued a freeze on new licenses, because of the unsolved problems with the exploding number of stations applying for licences), or even at the demand from the industry (as in 1927 when the chaos on the air was threatening the whole growing broadcasting business). Seldom has the FCC tried to anticipate problems, using regulations to mitigate future problems.

There are many reasons for this "reactive" approach towards regulations, the most important being that FCC by nature is susceptible to political change. The chairmen have been politically appointed (a common procedure in American government). In the 1950s, McCarthy proteges were appointed, probably facilitating the Communist hunt that haunted television during that decade. During the radical 1960s and early 1970s, FCC gradually adopted a more active regulative strategy, starting under FCC Chairman Newton N. Minow. In order to relax the networks control over their affiliates, Minow strengthened non-commercial broadcasting and moved generally in an anti-monopoly policy direction. Minow was also determined to improve the quality of programming. Addressing NAB--The national Association of Broadcasters--he delivered his famous "wasteland speech" in which he described television as a

vast wasteland. You will see a procession of game shows, violence, audience participation shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, /.../. And endlessly, commercials--many screaming, cajoling, and offending... (cited in Barnouw 1990:300).

Several propositions to improve the programming standards were presented during these years. The Family Viewing Time rule stated that during the time from 7pm to 9pm only programs suitable for the whole family (with less violence and sex) should be scheduled. As usual, the rule was opposed and finally ruled unconstitutional because it violated the first amendment. The ban on cigarette commercials in 1971 was another regulation introduced during these years. But again, the FCC's proposals were mostly reactions to the violent protests against television's programming standards that slowly had become increasingly loud and outspoken during this politically radical era.

Finally, in the market-liberal era of the 1980s, under the Reagan and Bush administrations, starting when Mark Fowler was appointed Chairman of FCC, the commission once again underwent a fundamental shift. Fowler was determined to implement Reagan's philosophy of laissez faire and market liberalism in the broadcasting industry. Deregulation became the keyword as the FCC entered its most anti-regulative phase in the history of broadcasting.

Television was no longer perceived as something special; it was regarded just as any other household utility, and the broadcasting business should be regulated no more than any other industry. Mark Fowler once used the phrase a "toaster with pictures" to describe his view on television (cited in Sterling and Kittross 1990:542).

These radical shifts of the FCC's policies have been triggered by political changes in the American society. And no doubt, the political turmoil has weakened FCC, causing it to suffer from discontinuity and lack of a coherent regulatory strategy. This pattern in turn has probably exacerbated the problems facing non-commercial broadcasting. Public radio and television are continuously struggling for funding, never knowing if the next administration will cut or increase spending.

FCC is also--partly because of its politically vulnerable position--very susceptible to lobbying from interest groups and from the broadcasting industry. Especially the NAB (the National Association of Broadcasters) has been extremely active in its relations with the Commission.

4.1.2 Regulating technology, market structure, and programming

In spite of FCC's reactive approach, the amount of regulations have grown considerably over the years. There are three potential areas of government regulation: (1) technology, (2) market structure, and (3) programming. In these areas, the government's activities has varied substantially over time. In summary (Table 3), the governments regulative practices can be divided into three distinct periods.

Table 3 The government's (FCC, FRC, FTC) regulative practices 1900-1990

	Technology	Market structure	Programming
1900-1927	R	A	D
1928-1976	A	A	R
1976-1980	D	D	D

A= Active regulation, R= Reactive regulation (mostly passive) D= Laissez faire and/or Deregulation

The government regulation of technology deals partly with defining technological standards, partly with assigning frequencies of the electromagnetic spectrum for various purposes and users. In the area of technical standards, the government was initially mostly reactive, then changed to becoming highly active (for instance when deciding on the standards for mono-chrome and color television). The active phase lasted up until the 1980s, when the government adopted a *laissez faire* approach, and for instance refused to decide on the standards for stereo AM radio, and instead chose to let the market rule.

Several government agencies are responsible for guarding the principle of Free enterprising, and for maintaining a healthy competition in the economy. In broadcasting, FCC has joined forces with the Federal Trade Commission in an effort to fight monopolies and oligopolies. Anti-trust laws have been the main weapon in this fight, and several important lawsuits were initiated during the early years of broadcasting. One example is when NBC was forced to divest itself of one of its networks (later to become ABC). Another example is in 1930 when the Justice Department sued RCA, GE, Westinghouse, and AT&T on antitrust laws. As a result, GE and Westinghouse withdrew from RCA in 1932, which made NBC a completely RCA owned subsidiary.

FCC itself has also been fairly active in the area of market concentration. For instance, in 1941 it laid down several rules that would relax the networks control over the stations, and decrease their dominance over their affiliates (Comstock 1989).

The main problem the government has had to face when attempting to regulate the broadcasting institutions is to maintain a healthy competition while at the same time protecting the existing industry. This developed into an acute problem in the 1980s, when the networks entered a financially complicated decade. To make the networks profitable, the government probably will have to relax some of the regulations that outrule the networks owning studios, a rule that for many years was the guard against total network oligopoly on the programming market.

The Reagan-era marked the beginning of the end of market regulations, including rules pertaining to broadcasting. To the Reagan administration, television was seen as just any commodity that should be regulated no more than any other industry. The attempts to deregulate broadcasting included among other things the abolishment of the "non-trafficking rule" that prevented speculation in TV stations. The number of TV stations that could be controlled by one owner also was raised from seven to twelve. In fact, it is these deregulations that have facilitated the speculative acquisitions and take-overs during the mid-1980s and early 1990s.

Not very surprisingly, programming is the area where the FCC has been most reluctant to regulate. The main problem for the Commission has been the conflict between the

first amendment of the Constitution, and the the Public Interest rule of the Communications Act. Over the years, individual stations as well as The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) have fiercely combated every single of FCC's efforts to impose rules and regulations on radio's and television's programming standards. In this fight, the first amendment has been their key weapon.

One of the reasons why FCC has been reluctant to state what programming in "the public interest" means might be the waves of protests that such a regulation probably would entail. Instead, most of FCC's requirements and standards have evolved slowly, embraced as a "tacit agreement" by all the actors in broadcasting. The "public service" requirement has been confined to the philosophy that stations are expected to provide a minimum of news and public affairs programs. To be sure, no station has ever lost its licence because the lack of "public service".

The most important programming policy document ever issued by FCC was an attempt to specify its views on the what the "public interest" refers to. In 1946, the commission published a book on the "Public Service Responsibility of Broadcast Licencees". "The Blue Book", as it became known as (because of the blue cover), stated that the public service responsibility of broadcasters should include the broadcasting of sustaining programs (unsponsored), local live shows, discussion on public issues, and no excessive advertising (Sterling and Kittross 1990:304).

Out of this document emerged two principles: "The fairness doctrine", requiring full and impartial treatment of a controversy, and "The equal time rule", requiring that candidates for public office be given equal opportunities for broadcast exposure (Comstock 1989:19). Both these principles were to be considered highly controversial, and eventually both were abolished. "The Equal time rule" was relaxed in 1960 to facilitate the airing of political debates between the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates; the first ones were the Great Debates between Kennedy and Nixon. "The Fairness Doctrine" was ruled unconstitutional in 1987, marking another victory of the first amendment over public service requirements.

Sterling and Kitross conclude (1990:580):

After more than 65 years of broadcasting, and nearly 60 years of broadcast regulation, the controlling phrase "public interest, convenience, and/or necessity" remains undefined beyond what the current political situation says it means, with resultant regulatory confusion.

The key political decisions pertaining to broadcasting--to let radio stations remain privately owned, operating for profit--were made early in the 1910 and 1920s.

Following those decisions, the general tendency of the American government, especially in an international comparison, has been to stay out of the broadcasting business. Indeed, most of the principles that the FCC have tried to establish have never been enforced. Even though the regulations became more frequent as television developed, it is still mainly left to the industry to practice self-regulation.

4.2 The economics of broadcasting: profit and competition

4.2.1 The Nielsen kingdom

Because radio and television are mass-advertising media, the guiding principle of all programming is to create and sustain the attention of the largest possible audience for the longest possible time. But to know who is watching what at every hour of the day requires an extensive system for collecting data on the audience. Since the beginning of radio and television broadcasting, the A.C. Nielsen company has been the leading provider of audience research for the networks. In fact, it still has a monopoly on national television ratings; the main competitor, Arbitron, conducts regional studies only.

Two concepts and measurements constitute the back bone of the audience measurement from Nielsen: ratings and shares. A rating is the percentage of viewership based on the total number of television homes in the United States. A share is a percentage of viewership based on the number of homes using television at a time. Consequently, a late-night show might receive a very low rating (because most people are asleep at the time) but a very high share (most people watching TV at the time are tuned in to the show) (Webster and Lichty 1991; Blum and Lindheim 1987:7). To the programmers of commercial television, the Nielsen ratings is king. The morning after a show has been aired, programmers receive data on how it fared. A few evenings with low ratings is sufficient for the cancellation of a show.

The mass audience appeal has always been the chief objective for the advertisers and programmers. While this remains true, the demographics of the audience have also become increasingly important. It was in the late 1960s that demographics became of interest to advertisers. It was then discovered that CBS had an audience which was proportionally older and more rural than that of the other networks, and that ABC fared particularly well among younger and more urban audiences (Gitlin 1983:56-57). Since the advertisers primarily were interested in reaching the groups that were most likely to buy their products, and very much of the purchasing power is to be found among younger people, this became a major problem for CBS. As a result, they discontinued several of their series with a rural/older appeal, like *Gunsmoke* (the western that then had been on air for 20 years), and instead launched *All in the Family*, *Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *M*A*S*H*. Typically, these were comedies depicting younger people embracing values of the 1960s (Gitlin 1983:211).

4.2.2 Programming for advertisers: the rules of the game

Because programming essentially is a vehicle for advertisers, its main concern is not to satisfy the audience. High ratings and "popularity" are merely means to reach the ultimate goal of profit-making. The sociologist Todd Gitlin (1983) has studied the programming practices of the networks, and points out that the networks essentially has two audiences; NBC research vice-president Gerald M. Jaffe is quoted in Gitlin's book (1983:252-253):

We have two markets. With a movie, there's one audience; whether people like it or not, they've still paid for the ticket. But with TV there are two audiences: advertisers and people at home. With the audience, you could get very high ratings with frontal nudity, penetration, torture, and people being cut up with a chainsaw. But Congress would shriek, and so would advertisers. It would make a hard sell for Hamburger Helper.

To succeed, the networks have to cater to the interests of both audiences; they have to reach the largest possible audience, but only by employing means approved of by the advertisers. In this process, the number one rule is to avoid controversy. This strategy has entailed a careful avoidance of programs with any potential political implications.

However, this is not to say that there have not been protests from segments of society against the content and programming practices of television. Thus, in the 1950s there was a formidable witch hunt for alleged Communists in the broadcasting industry, headed by the group "American Business Consultants". Moreover, in the 1960s there were protests from minorities and other social groups--blacks, homosexuals, women--against under- and mis-representation in the media. These protests continued into the 1970s and became supplemented by an intense debate on the amount and effects of violence on television. In the 1980s, the new right political movement, including the "Moral Majority", staged a crusade against sex on TV. Also, the Coalition for Better Television (CBTV) monitors the network schedule for signs of "obscenity", broken down into neat categories like "skin scenes", "sexual innuendo" and "implied sexual intercourse".

Since sex and violence are essentially the most common "spices" used in network programming, producers invariably encounter the problem of using the "right" amount of spice to attract audiences without being controversial or offending.

The second rule is to provide programs that are both "interesting" (meaning programs that can keep millions of viewers in front of the set) for the audience, and "suitable" for

advertisers. The programs must be interesting but not too involving, because involving programs might cause the audience to react negatively when an important scene is interrupted with a message from the sponsors. Advertisers can not risk that the viewers will reject the commercial.

According to this strategy, light entertainment is perfect on the schedule, while emotional and complicated dramas are the worst possible choice (as are politically controversial programs, but they are already ruled out by the first principle). The entertainment should be put into familiar formats and serialization, making it easier for advertisers to repeatedly reach the same target audience. The same viewers will watch approximately the same type of "content" at the same time each week. These programs are also easier to "cut", without disturbing the action.

These two principles have encouraged the tremendous concentration on light entertainment in serial form that for years have characterized network programming. At the same time, news and public affairs programs in general are the losers in the competition for audiences. This fact was recognized very early in the networks' history. Since networks, by virtue of profit-making, must air the most "popular" show possible at any given time, news and documentaries had to give. The Prime-time schedules for the networks since the beginning of television broadcasting indicate that the networks have not aired a regular news program during prime-time hours (from 8 pm to 11 pm) since the 1947-1948 season. In the 1948-49 season, the 15 minutes evening news shows were moved to the 7.30 pm time slot (for CBS News) or the 7.45 time slot (for DuMont and NBC). When television entered the 1959-60 season all the networks (the DuMont network folded in 1956) had moved their evening news casts to the time slot between 6pm and 7pm (Castleman and Podrazik 1983). The network rule seems to be that news and public affairs do not belong on prime-time television. The exceptions to this rule are occasional documentaries and a few magazine format public affairs programs such as 60 minutes on CBS and 20/20 on ABC.

Over time, advertisers have influenced programming both indirectly--as I have described above--and directly, by determining the program content. In the beginning of broadcasting, advertisers produced the shows and sold them to the network. They owned the shows, and often put their name on the program. In the 1960s, however, advertisers changed their practices from sponsoring whole shows to spot advertising. There were two reasons for this. The first was that the economics of the industry changed so that the advertiser no longer could afford sponsoring whole programs. The price of advertising rose sharply, partly because of increasing costs in program production, partly because of television's dispersion among the population which made it possible for the stations to raise the ad-rates.

The second reason was the quiz-show scandal in the late 1950s. The scandal occurred when it was revealed that the tremendously popular quiz-show "The \$64 000

Question" had been rigged on several occasions, and that the sponsor of the program, Revlon, had been the driving force behind these incidents. The scandal hit the networks more strongly than the sponsors. It took CBS several years to restore its reputation. In the process, the networks assumed more control over its programming. They could no longer "afford" the risk of advertisers ruling the shows.

Television's largest advertisers are mega-corporations like Procter & Gamble, General Foods and General Motors. Cigarette manufacturers used to be powerful advertisers until cigarette advertising was banned in 1971 (cigarette advertising accounted for 10 percent of the network advertising income). During the long history of broadcasting sponsors have been known to withdraw (or threaten to withdraw) from the sponsorship of programs because of the content of programs. Usually, the reason has been potential political, or otherwise controversial, implications of programs. However, according to Gitlin (1983), they generally would keep those decisions hidden from public knowledge. However, in 1981, several big advertisers discontinued their sponsorship of several programs, including movies, for reasons "of taste" (sex, violence, profanity) and admitted this publicly, something which they had not done before (Gitlin 1983:257ff).

Clearly, advertisers' demands restrict the options available with respect to programming formats and content. However, within the commonly accepted entertainment-serial form, television has varied greatly in content and style over the years. There has been cycles of genres popularity, like the "Western era" in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Gunsmoke, Cheyenne), the "relevance" shows of the late sixties and early 1970s (East Side/West Side), and the "real life drama" of the 1980s (LA Law, Hill Street Blues).

The suggested explanations to these changes have been several, ranging from the theory that TV simply is reflecting social changes and audience demands (Papazian 1991), to more conspiratorial hypotheses, such as Lichter et al (1991), who argue that television in the 1980s has become "overtly political, cause-oriented, and anti-establishment", because of the social- change oriented ambitions of the liberal (and in every way non- middle-American) producers that constitute Hollywood's creative community (Lichter et al 1991). However, as Rose (1985:7-8) points out:

Tempting as these retrospective cultural analyses are, it is difficult to accept the view that the TV genre production process has ever been decisively shaped by the immediate political or social environment. Too many other factors prelude such a direct response. Television's need to satisfy the country's largest advertisers by reaching the largest possible audience makes its imperative that programs stay comfortably behind the times in order to avoid alienating anyone. The public seems to prefer familiarity and predictability in its weekly program fare, which helps account for the fact that once a

series wins its way into viewers hearts, it usually will remain on the air for at least a few seasons before dropping off in popularity. When TV genres do change, it is more often the result of network programming practices and production techniques than a sudden thematic reaction to new cultural concerns. One of the most important sources of format development has been the intense competition between ABC, CBS, and NBC for the ratings supremacy. In their battle to attract large and loyal audiences, the three commercial networks have introduced a variety of elements to increase their immediate appeal. Like most genre manufacturers, the chief weapons in the networks' competitive arsenal have usually included the perennially popular spices of violence and sex.

Who is wrong and right in the discussion of the causes of changes in programming is hard to decide. To the extent that the changes of prime-time entertainment over time are the network programmers' way of responding to the changing values and expectations of the audiences, the key strategy seem to be to incorporate "new content" into a familiar, advertiser suitable program format.

4.2.3 The economy of scale and the network oligopoly

Because of television's glamorous facade, it is easy to forget that broadcasting is an industry. As such, it is operating under the same demands on efficiency and profit as every other industry in the United States. Thus, the broadcasting business shares with other manufacturing businesses the same need for economy of scale. Indeed, it is this economic dictate that has caused programming to come almost monopolized by the networks, and secondly, that has made it so difficult for many of the new satellite channels to succeed, particularly those who are trying to provide specialized, quality programming.

The need for economy of scale became apparent for the broadcasting industry at a very early stage of their development. The cost of program production rose so sharply that only mass distribution could make the programs profitable. As a result, local radio and TV stations could not afford to make their own shows. The only program suppliers that could provide this mass audience were the networks, and subsequently they developed into the main providers of programs for 50 years. The need for mass distribution also meant that it was never profitable to produce programs for minority groups or groups with special interests. Programs must appeal to the masses. A small but loyal and devoted audience did not suffice.

The cable distributed channels suffer less from this need for economy of scale. Since they can support their programming from subscriber fees as well as from advertising, they can survive also with smaller audiences. That said, these new specialized channels

often have financial problems, too. Their audiences are too small, and the production costs are too high, to make the business profitable.

4.3 Technological forces: the social origins of technology

4.3.1 Against technological determinism

The tremendous effectiveness of the market economy to stimulate and facilitate rapid technological development is an important key to understanding the development of American broadcasting. The increasing pace of development and diffusion of new technologies (like television sets, VCRs, camcorders etc) can largely be attributed to the effectiveness of the market economy in developing and manufacturing advanced technological products, making them affordable to the general public.

However, technologies are not economically or socially neutral. Instead, they are developed and manufactured for somebody by somebody for a certain purpose. As Winston (1990:55) points out in his article "How Are Media Born?":

Technologies are not neutral. They embody ideas, needs, imagination, possibilities from specific time periods. They are particular solutions to certain problems, usually not the only possible solutions. The same problem identified in another cultural context might find a quite different solution...

Many historical studies of the development of broadcasting suffer from what can be described as a technological determinism, especially when dealing with the earliest period of broadcasting, when radio was invented. Winston (1990:57) continues:

In its simplest form, this dominant theory explains the essentially internal process of research and development as nothing more than the biographies of the scientists and technologists involved, arranged chronologically. This account sees the development and impact of technology as the progress of the great men.

Technological determinists tend to argue that technologies develop by their own force, and subsequently define the conditions for social change and development. This perspective pays too little attention to the social forces that both accelerate and obstruct new technologies. The works of Inglis (1990) shows how the development of technology always must be linked to its creators. One of the most prominent characteristics of the development of radio and television in the United States is the fierce battle between economically powerful corporations (and their employed inventors) for technological superiority and market domination.

First, during the invention phase of both television and radio, there were several battles over patent rights. These battles often resulted in litigations that could go on for years, with devastating effects on those involved. Financial ruin and personal tragedies were common in the aftermath of these court procedures. However, many of these early battles were crucial in the formation of the broadcasting industry as we know it today. Later, the corporate battles also often involved the government as a prominent player, especially when the fight has related to the definition of various technical standards. The long lasting battle between CBS and RCA over the standards of color television involved FCC as mediator and regulator. Inglis concludes (1990:xv):

The development of radio and television technology cannot be adequately presented or understood as an isolated phenomena since it occurred in the larger context of the business and regulatory environment. Technical progress has been inextricably intertwined with business growth and government regulation. Each depends on the other in a major way.

The discussion on the technology of broadcasting is also quite often restricted to the development of the technology of transmission and reception of voice and sound over the air. However, broadcasting technology is much more than just this problem, and the impact of technology is found on many other levels. A case in point is the technological breakthroughs in video technology--the invention of the videorecorder and videofilm, the ENG technique (electronic newsgathering and editing), satellites and SNG (satellite news gathering), camcorders and digital technique--that allow for easy, portable, direct broadcasting from any place at any time in the world. These developments have profoundly altered the way in which television is made and, more essentially, it has totally changed its societal role.

4.4 The audience: a changing social structure

4.4.1 The "demand" for broadcasting and the consumer economy

The diffusion of radio and television is an example of the diffusion of new technologies in general. But compared to other technological innovations, the diffusion of radio and TV has been exceptionally fast. It took the telephone 80 years to reach 34 million American homes (Sterling and Kittross 1990:664). The automobile took 49 years, the electric refrigerator 37 years, radio 25 years and television 10 years. The hours the average family is tuned in to television have increased steadily, from 4 hours and 35 minutes per day in 1950 to 7 hours and 8 minutes per day in 1986 (Sterling and Kittross 1990:659).

What were the reasons for this incredible expansion of both radio and television? The most obvious reason was that radio and TV were interesting, useful and affordable. It is

hardly controversial to say that no new technology can successfully be introduced in a society unless there is a need and/or a demand for it. But the concepts of "need" and "demand" are diffuse. It is disputable whether demand is something that exists among people, or something that can be cultivated or, indeed, created in the process of introducing a new product on a market. Demand may be seen as the explication of need, but in its subjective appearance it is even more easily manipulated.

Therefore, to argue that the radio and television explosion among the American public happened because there was a strong need or demand for them, is not really to explain the phenomena. As a matter of fact, not even the inventors could conceive of the potential and impact of the "machine" that they had created. However, there was a potential audience that could be convinced that radio or television was new, interesting and/or useful, and maybe worth its price. Radio and television programs were also provided free of charge to the audience, only at the "price" of having to watch commercials. The rapid development of radio during the depression has been explained with reference to this circumstance. Indeed, the very last asset a devastated farmer would sell was his radio.

However, along with these factors, there also exist more fundamental structural factors that contributed to the rapid expansion of television and radio: the changing economic and social structure of the American society. First, there was the development of the modern industrial society, especially the increasing amount of leisure time available to the American public, facilitated by increasing productivity and the division of labor. Secondly, and more important, there was a powerful development of the consumer economy, which made "mass" radio and "mass" television possible. Indeed, along with the PC-industry, the broadcasting industry is one of few cases where the industry have both triggered the demand as well as provided the supply.

The consumer economy is characterized by the rapid production and consumption of manufactured goods. In this process, and on these competitive markets, advertising is key to business success. *What distinguishes USA from many European countries was the strong and almost immediate political support for television as a suitable vehicle for mass advertising.* At the individual level, consumerism is often translated into the ideology of individualism and material success. The content of broadcasting, viewed in this perspective, is created to provide an environment suitable for advertising, and to promote consumption. Critical sociologist Todd Gitlin (1983:268-269) argues:

(T)elevision's world is relentlessly upbeat, clean, and materialistic. Even more sweepingly, with few exceptions, primetime gives us people preoccupied with personal ambition. If not utterly consumed by ambition and the fear of ending up as losers, these characters take both the ambition

and the fear for granted. If not surrounded by middle-class arrays of consumer goods, they themselves are glamorous incarnations of desire. The happiness they long for is private, not public; they make few demands on society as a whole, and even when troubled they seem content with the existing institutional order. Personal ambition and consumerism are the driving forces of their lives. The sumptuous and brightly lit settings of most series amount to advertisements for a consumption-centered version of the good life, and this doesn't even take into consideration the incessant commercials, which convey the idea that human aspirations for liberty, pleasure, accomplishment, and status can be fulfilled in the realm of consumption. The relentless background hum of prime time is this packed good life.

4.5 Explaining stability: the resistive forces of politics, economy, technology and the audience

As has been shown in the previous chapters a key feature of American broadcasting is the continuity and stability regarding programming practices and market structures. In spite of that, little attention has been paid to the forces that promote this stability. All studies of media development seem to suffer from an inherent bias towards discussing the forces that contribute to change. However, each of the four factors that shaped American broadcasting have two sides: one that encourages change and one that sustains status quo. In this last section, I will briefly discuss why the previously described political, economic, technological and social forces have caused much of the inherent inertia of the broadcasting system.

4.5.1. Politics: preserving regulations

Decisions and regulations, around which a whole industry is built, are hardly something that can be changed easily. The history of American broadcasting substantiates how regulations, including those which are not very well supported, become the norm and the expectations of all the actors in the system. For regulators, continuity in decision-making, and the sustainment of their regulations, ultimately become questions of legitimacy. Therefore, even poor or out-dated political decisions tend to linger in the system and become resistive forces.

4.5.2 Economics: fighting the new media

The key strategy in competitive corporate behavior is to battle competition. One way of doing this is to try to keep potential competitors from entering the market. The established industry is generally opposed to newcomers: the old media invariably

combat newcomers.

There are numerous examples of this behaviour. First, there was the Press-radio war in the 1930s, in which the press tried to obstruct the development of radio as a news medium, by prohibiting the news bureaus (UP, AP, INS) to supply radio with news. There was also the record industry's ill-fated attempt to keep recorded music from being played on radio (until it discovered the enormous promotional effects of radio for record sales). Similarly, the film industry initially refused to have feature films aired on television. It was not until 1954, when ABC made a deal with Walt Disney for a Disneyland series, and a similar deal with Warner Brothers for a series of films (Warner Brothers Presents), that a major film studio entered into television. In recent years the cable industry has been opposed by the broadcast (over-the-air) industry, which has made several attempts to put an halt to the cable-revolution. However, what also seems to be true is that the prevailing media normally are not successful in preventing new media from entering the market. Instead, over time the old media realize that they will have to adapt and reposition themselves, relative to the newcomers, in the market system. This is what happened to radio when television came. And it will happen to the networks when they face the competition from the cable/satellite industry; they have to adapt to the changing market situation.

A second rule seems to be that new media tend to borrow formats from older media. This became a distinguishing quality of television in the early years. Many of the early television formats were imported from radio, like the daytime womens' serial (the soap opera), and the quiz program. Even more interesting is that most of these early formats remain the main feature of current television. While this pattern provides continuity, it also works as a stabilizing, preserving force.

4.5.3. Technology: the technological standards

Once a technological standard is established, whether through government regulation or voluntary agreement, it is very hard to change, even when a superior technology is discovered. People have invested in radio sets and television receivers, and unless the new system is compatible with the old, change is very difficult. Technological standards therefore work as conserving, resistive forces in the media system. There are numerous examples of this throughout the years. The introduction of FM radio was delayed for a long time, even though FM technology was much superior to its predecessor, AM radio. More recently the introduction of HD Television (High Definition) seems to stall, mainly because the new and improved technology is incompatible with the old television technologies used all over the world.

4.5.4. The audience: media habits

Watching television or listening to the radio are habits, developed over time. From childhood, people learn what to expect from the media, and they learn how to use them to their own satisfaction. Television viewing is a ritual where "the familiar" seems to be preferred over excitement and novelty. People's habits thus become a resistive force against change. This might be the reason why the same basic formula of sitcoms succeeds over and over again. Television provides entertainment and diversion in a familiar and comfortable package.

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