

only a *representation* of reality, whereas television can make a claim to truth in its representations. This argument sees nothing sinister in the media concealing the processes by which meaning is made – indeed, some of these processes are ‘inevitable’ – but suspicions are voiced where television professionals are less than honest and open about the techniques they employ (Masterman 1985). Thus newscasters who claim objectivity rather than acknowledging their rhetorical stance might be criticised on these grounds (see *News*). Some analysts working in the field of media education have advocated education of the *audience* from an early age with the objective of developing a ‘more critical eye’.

Masterman offers us a list of rhetorical techniques including selection, the combination of image and linguistic text, suppression of the existence or effect of camera, crew and reporter, film and sound editing, and *narrative* (Masterman 1985).

Using television news as an example, consideration could be given to what stories were selected, the order they were shown, the tone of the reporter, the way violence might seem to be emanating from only one side, the way the reporter’s tones matched the imagery, the way in which the audience is given a particular visual point of view (‘in there’ with the reporter, experiencing the problems at first hand, or maybe external to the action with an uninvolved and less caring overview). An understanding of rhetoric might allow the viewer to question the actual truth or validity of the situation. So, the selection of two ‘balanced’ viewpoints to illustrate a political conflict might be critically assessed as setting up a limited spectrum of debate (see *Objectivity*).

Some critics have perceived a tendency in Masterman’s work to identify a single meaning in a text and to tie this to the workings of a dominant *ideology*. However, the resurrection of rhetoric as a concept has been helpful in provoking a debate on the methods and meanings of various television *genres*, including *documentary* and television news.

See also: Educational television; News; Semiology/semiotics

Further reading: Barthes (1988); Emerson (1993); Masterman (1985)

SCHEDULING

A television schedule is the running order in which programmes are placed during a day. As Ellis (2000) observes, while individual programmes may be the ‘building blocks’ of television, the schedule

is the 'architecture', giving structure and meaning to blocks of programmes on a given channel. A familiarity with the schedule allows the *audience* member to order their viewing around particular programmes, perhaps the *news* or a favourite sitcom or *soap*. This familiarity makes viewing a very habitual activity, allowing broadcasters to make concrete assumptions about who is watching and when. Predictability is important, as one of the core aims of scheduling is to assist broadcasters in capturing the biggest audience possible, thus maximising *advertising* revenues. The careful scheduling of programmes in particular slots may also allow a broadcaster to win viewers away from other television channels. As a result, scheduling has become increasingly important as an aspect of competitive ratings wars. For example, by placing popular programmes either at peak viewing time or when a competitor's programming is poor, or by hiding weaker programmes at quieter times in the schedule, a broadcaster can increase the number of people tuning in to their station. Often, less popular or newer programmes are squeezed between two established programmes in the schedule, a process called 'hammocking', in the hope that viewers already tuned in will keep watching. A consequence of these activities is that the scheduler is effectively responsible for creating a *narrative* of viewing in which different programmes, old and new, are blended together into a package (Ellis 2000).

With increasing competition in the television market, due largely to the availability of more channels via satellite, cable and digital *technologies*, it has become harder for broadcasters to ensure viewer loyalty to their channel. In this context, efficient scheduling pays an even greater dividend. Abercrombie (1996) argues that broadcasters used to make their programmes first and then decided when to schedule them. Now their foremost concern is about ratings and capturing particular audiences, so they decide the schedule and then commission programme-makers to produce shows for specific slots. As a result, scheduling is crucial to the strategic planning of television companies and is more often than not the responsibility of senior managers.

However, broadcasters do not always have the freedom to schedule programmes when they see fit. Sometimes they are restricted by laws and mandates telling them what kind of programming they can show and, on occasion, when they can show it. As a result, scheduling strategies vary from place to place. For example, in post-war Britain successive governments have placed restrictions on the content of terrestrial television channels, including the BBC, ITV and more

recently Channel 4 and Channel 5. This is because British television has developed within a model of *public service broadcasting*, which dictates not only the mix of programmes that have to be shown (which must include news, educational programmes and minority programming) but also, on occasion, where in the schedule some of those programmes should come. Paterson (1990) has suggested that, in comparison, American television has developed along a more *commercial* model, with fewer legal restrictions on scheduling or content. In this climate American broadcasters have been able to pursue an aggressive 'jugular' approach to scheduling, where each broadcaster simply tries to maximise their ratings and take viewers away from other stations.

Perhaps the most important skill of the scheduler is to match programmes to audiences watching at different times of the day. For example, *children's television* usually starts in the middle of the afternoon, when children come home from school. Major news bulletins are also reserved for times in the schedule when adults come home from work. *Soap operas* are an example of a carefully scheduled *genre*. Viewed by many theorists as a genre for women, they are traditionally screened during the daytime when, supposedly, many women are (or were) working in the home. In its infancy during the 1930s, the soap opera developed as a radio serial sponsored by soap manufacturers, such as Proctor and Gamble. Here, the genre developed to meet both the needs of broadcasters who wanted to win high daytime ratings, and the needs of advertisers who wanted to capture the mind and money of the person controlling home finances. In their view this was the housewife, who would be most likely to watch daytime television in gaps between household jobs.

Clearly, this approach to scheduling assumes that people, particularly families, watch television in very predictable ways. Indeed, Paterson has argued that schedules are carefully constructed around models of *family* behaviour. These assume, for example, that people eat meals throughout the evening or do household chores while the television is on. In response, schedulers commission many programmes, such as soaps, that can be watched without the viewer paying full attention to the television set. The break-up of a soap into small narrative segments, lasting only a few minutes, means that we can easily lock back on to the story, even if we have missed the preceding segment. However, schedulers not only have to respond to chaotic household conditions, but they must also tailor their schedules to accommodate *when* different family members are watching. It is commonly accepted by broadcasters that children dictate viewing

in the early evening, until 7.30 p.m., while women will take over control for the next ninety minutes, with men directing programme choice after 9 p.m. This *gendered* behaviour affects the content of the schedule, with serious current affairs or documentary programming coming later in the night. This decision clearly carries with it a commonsense view of male and female viewing preferences that reveals disparities in cultural power between men and women. Many *feminist* scholars have taken this as evidence that television plays a role in upholding patriarchy. For serious programming is gendered masculine and brings with it a high cultural status that is borne out in the practice and content of late-night schedules, when full attention can be paid to the television set. Women's interests, on the other hand, are perceived to be located in the personal rather than the public sphere and are represented in programmes like soaps, which suffer low cultural status despite high viewing figures. This lower status relegates these shows to a time when the home is often dominated by noisy distractions. Although schedulers are clearly working with an archaic perception of family viewing behaviour, based around very conservative stereotypes, the idea of the typical family viewing unit remains very influential on their decisions.

Scheduling also has an important role in regulating our experience of television viewing. Raymond Williams (1974) has argued that television is not received as a set of discrete and distinct programmes, but as a flow or sequence of images and feelings that we absorb over a whole day or evening. Most programmes are broken up by adverts or by trailers for other items, which are not directly related to the narrative of the show being watched. For Williams, this leads to a disjointed and uneasy experience that diminishes the quality and experience of viewing. However, for a commercial broadcaster, maintaining the flow of viewing is crucial. It is hoped, for example, that popular programmes will hook people into the sequence of items offered on a particular channel, while trailers will remind viewers of upcoming pleasures so that they do not hop across to another station. The scheduler's art, then, is not in placing individual programmes into the itinerary, but in creating a seamless televisual flow that secures channel loyalty. When we look at a television schedule it gives the illusion that we are watching a set of distinct events when, in actuality, we are not.

Nowadays, however, this seamless flow of viewing is increasingly difficult to maintain. Through the 1970s and onwards many people owned video recorders (in 1994, 77 per cent of British homes had one) and did not need to watch programmes when they were aired.

The video is itself now an archaic commodity, with many electrical stores not selling them. Instead, we can look to a future of broadband or internet protocol television, where we can download our favourite shows on demand and construct our own schedule of viewing irrespective of time. This is already true for radio podcasting, which has proven very popular. With a rapid *convergence* of media forms, and multi-platform delivery, on-demand television is likely to be the thing of the future. This will make it harder for schedulers to dictate or predict television consumption, if indeed they have much of a role at all. Similarly, increased channel choice through satellite, cable and digital services has fragmented audiences. Broadcasters now pitch their schedules against a multitude of competitors, uncertain about who is watching what and when.

See also: Audiences; Advertising; Commercial television; Convergence; Family/domestic viewing; Public service broadcasting

Further reading: Abercrombie (1996); Ellis (2000); Paterson (1990); R. Williams (1974)

SCIENCE FICTION

Science fiction is a complex *genre*, found on television as well as in other forms of media. While it might be possible to take a *drama* programme about space travel and state unambiguously that it fitted within the category of science fiction, there are many films and television programmes which share the *conventions* of other genres, such as *comedy* or *crime*. Moreover, science fiction has a couple of close relatives in the horror and fantasy genres, and the science-fiction genre itself includes a number of sub-genres (extraterrestrial, technophobia, conspiracy, etc.). Thus there is scope for overlap and generic confusion, and increasingly television programmes mix or play with the conventions of different genres. In these cases, it is sometimes argued that such texts are examples of *postmodern* television. A good example of this tendency is *The X-Files*, which mixes science fiction with the crime/FBI detective genre, and in some episodes also incorporates parody or horror. Science fiction has been successfully combined with comedy in such series as *Red Dwarf* and *Third Rock from the Sun* and with romance, as in *Roswell*.

Televised science fiction has a long history, but as a literary and then radio and cinematic genre its roots are even deeper. Around 160 AD,