

EPISODE 4

# The evolution of television: authorship and art

# U.S Network Oligopoly: mid-1950s to mid- 1980s

- Limited broadcasting spectrum
- Free to air – advertising-based
- Three network oligopoly – 90% of market share
- “Least objectionable programming”



I invite each of you to sit down in front of your own television set when your station goes on the air and stay there, for a day, without a book, without a magazine, without a newspaper, without a profit and loss sheet or a rating book to distract you. Keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that what you will observe is a **vast wasteland**.

You will see a procession of game shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, western bad men, western good men, private eyes, gangsters, more violence, and cartoons. And endlessly, commercials — many screaming, cajoling, and offending. And most of all, boredom.

Newton N. Minow, "[Television and the Public Interest](#)", address to the National Association of Broadcasters, Washington, D.C., May 9, 1961.

Requiem for a Heavyweight by Rod Serling, presented last night on *Playhouse 90*, was a play of overwhelming force and tenderness. It was an artistic triumph that featured a performance of indescribable poignancy by Jack Palance in the part of the inarticulate has-been of the prize ring.

Jack Gould, "Rod Serling's Drama Scores a Knockout", *The New York Times*, 12 October 1956.



Rod Serling and  
Gene  
Roddenberry:  
standing out  
from the “boob  
tube”

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# The television industry changes: 1970s/1980s



## Developments in market research:

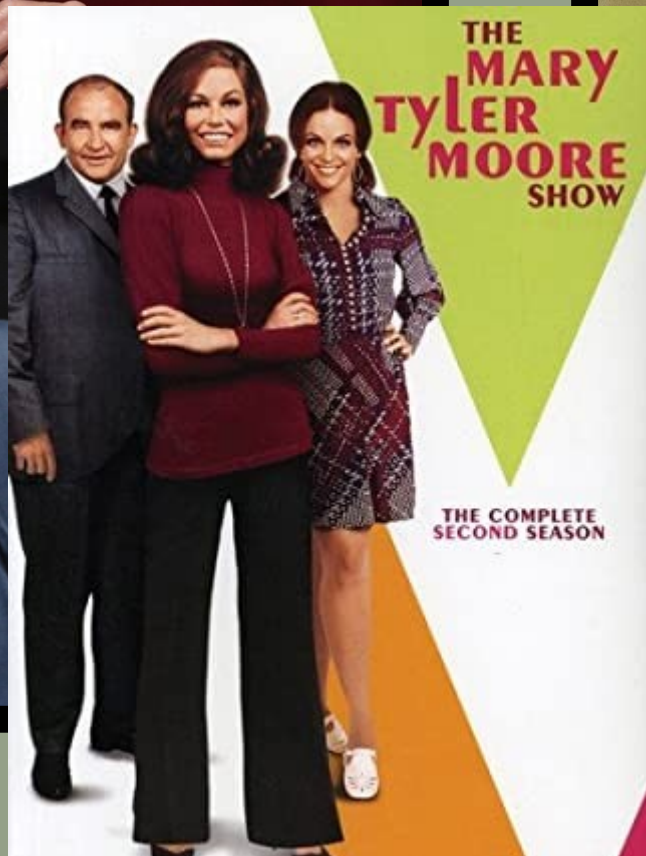
As new technologies for audience measurement emerge, advertisers become more aware of which demographics buy their products

# The television industry changes: 1970s/1980s

## Rise of cable and satellite channels:

- No longer free to air: possible to limit access and demand pay.
- New channels are funded through subscription or subscription and advertising.
- A targeted audience, “narrowcasting”, filling a specific niche in the market.
- Importance of distinction and channel brands.





# *The Producer's Medium:* Writer-producers and choric creativity

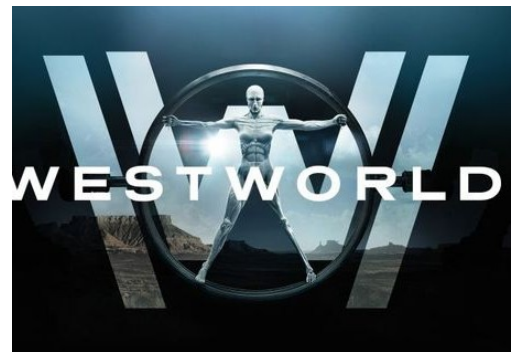
Newcomb and Alley are especially interested in producers “who create in the ‘bardic’ center of our shared culture” versus those who use the medium for individual expression (Newcomb and Alley 1983, 34). Newcomb terms the latter mode “lyric” television, which is “rooted in subjective response” to the culture and operates in a voice that is “personal rather than social” (Newcomb and Alley 1983, 37). Newcomb and Alley are more interested, conversely, in television’s “choric” function, its capacity to explore “the central regions of the American mind,” and “the shared systems of meaning and symbol that form our cultural life” (Newcomb and Alley 1983, 43)

Alisa Perren and Thomas Schatz, “Theorizing Television’s Writer–Producer: Re-viewing The Producer’s Medium”, *Television & New Media*, 2015, Vol. 16(1) 86–93



# “Cult” and “Quality” television

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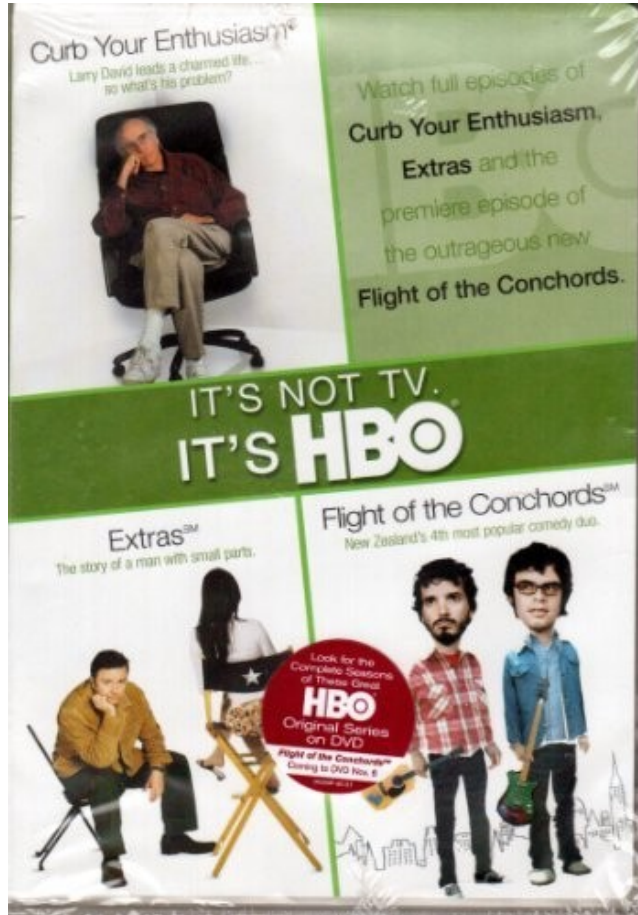


- ✓ Target an upscale, usually young/educated, intensely loyal and engaged audience
- ✓ Rich and complex storyworlds
- ✓ Sophisticated, witty and self-referential writing
- ✓ High production values; striking, visually distinctive cinematography
- ✓ Opportunities for fan participation and creativity
- ✓ Complicated plots require close attention and spark discussion



# "It's Not TV": HBO and the legitimation of television

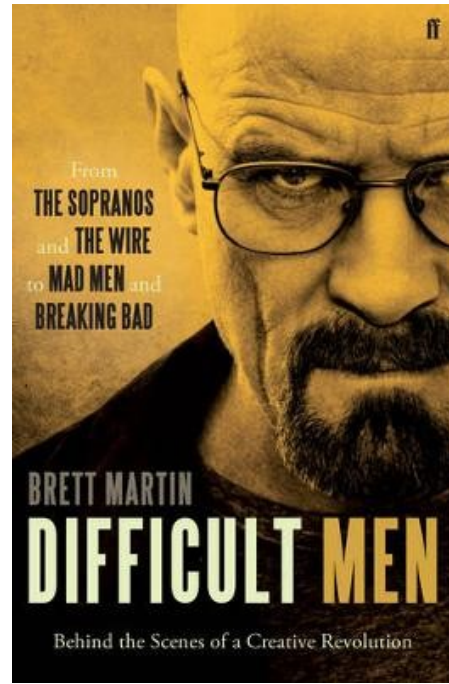
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"I don't give a fuck—I hate television."

David Chase, creator,  
*The Sopranos*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jxv0vZXfu4A>



# The showrunner as auteur: Genius comes to television

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYWRgqRcSO4>

# Exercise: The showrunner goes international

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The US brand name showrunner model has affected and been emulated by television writer-producers in other countries: for example, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss (BBC *Sherlock*).

- Who is the “author” of Czech television?
- Do you know the names of television writers? Producers? Directors?
- Are they ever featured in television promotion? Look for promotional paratexts: trailers, interviews, social media accounts.
- Do you believe the showrunner model is suitable for Czech television?

