

# TUBE TALK

**BIG IDEAS IN TELEVISION**

## Discussion Questions

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<b>The Great Divide: Norman Lear, Archie Bunker, and the Rise of the Bad Fan</b> Emily Nussbaum	4
<b>Us and Them</b> David Sedaris	6
<b>Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television</b> George Carlin	7
<b>The Amiable Madness of <i>Green Acres</i></b> Noel Murray	8
<b>Brad Carrigan, American</b> George Saunders	9
<b>Empires of the New World (selection)</b> Pamela Douglas, interview with Ted Sarandos	10
<b>“Time to Go”: Dreaming of a Televised Future (selection)</b> Dade Hayes	11
<b>Hasta Siempre</b> Jean Burnet	12
<b>From “Lessons from Television”</b> Susan Stewart	13
<b>Pursuit of the Public Interest in the Vast Wasteland</b> Walter J. Podrazik	14



Great  
Books  
Foundation

<b>What I Learned from Kristi Yamaguchi</b>	15
Nicole Chung	
<b>Control (selection)</b>	16
Frank Rose	
<b>The Age of Show Business (selection)</b>	17
Neil Postman	
<b>Judge in Simpson Trial Allows TV Camera in Courtroom</b>	18
David Margolick	
<b>To Remember History You Have to Repeat It</b>	19
Tony Hoagland	
<b>The Moon Hours</b>	20
E. B. White and others	
<b>Getting Dirty</b>	21
Mark Crispin Miller	
<b>The First Presidential Debate (selection)</b>	22
Alan Schroeder	
<b>The Revolution Will Not Be Televised</b>	23
Gil Scott-Heron	
<b>The Missing Remote</b>	24
Diane Lockward	
<b>Dolls and Feelings: Jill Soloway's Post-Patriarchal Television (selection)</b>	25
Ariel Levy	
<b>Pop History on an Epic Scale: <i>Roots</i></b>	26
Donald Bogle	
<b>Desperately Selling Soda</b>	27
Leslie Savan	
<b>The TV</b>	28
Ben Loory	
<b>Television, Reality, and Cold War Citizenship (selection)</b>	29
Alan Nadel	
<b>In the End, They Were Born on TV</b>	30
Douglas Kearney	
<b>Why Is “Everyman” a White Guy?</b>	31
Aziz Ansari	
<b>Kim’s Fairytale Wedding (selection)</b>	32
Kate Durbin	

# The Great Divide: Norman Lear, Archie Bunker, and the Rise of the Bad Fan

Emily Nussbaum

## Does Nussbaum see the divided audience of *All in The Family* more as the result of it being “an incoherent text” or it being “a bold experiment”? (14)

1. Why does Nussbaum initially call viewers who sympathize with a show’s antihero “bad fans”? (6)
2. According to Nussbaum, what made the “loudmouthed buffoon” Archie Bunker also “one of TV’s most resonant and beloved television characters”? (7)
3. How does Nussbaum explain why some contemporary critics saw *All in the Family* as satirizing bigotry, while others saw the show as perpetuating it?
4. According to Nussbaum, why is it that the tone of *All in the Family* “gradually softened”? (10)
5. Does Nussbaum agree with the critics who felt that the problem with *All in the Family* was actually the audience?
6. Why does Nussbaum think that “there is no way—and maybe no reason—to unite TV’s divided audience”? (14)

## Does Nussbaum approve or disapprove of Norman Lear’s ambition to “purge prejudice by exposing it”? (6)

1. Why does Nussbaum begin the article with the “nervous disclaimer” that aired before the first episode of *All in the Family*? (5)
2. What is Nussbaum’s attitude toward John Leonard’s call for critics to “clean up this culture”? (9)
3. Why does Nussbaum describe having “bridled” when an ethicist praises her for calling a show “odious torture porn”? (12)
4. Why does Nussbaum respond to the ethicist by telling her that “I wanted originality, even if it was ugly”? (12)
5. What does Nussbaum mean when she calls for television to embody “an ethical quality that is embedded in real originality”? (14)

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## The Great Divide: Norman Lear, Archie Bunker, and the Rise of the Bad Fan, *continued*

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Do you think it makes sense to tell people that they are watching a show “wrong”?
- What shows do you think divide audiences today? Do they divide audiences more over aesthetic or social issues?
- Do you agree with Nussbaum that the best television shows “rattle us and wake us up”?

## Us and Them

David Sedaris

### **At the end of the piece, why does Sedaris choose to watch television instead of taking a “good look” at his reaction to the Tomkeys? (21)**

1. Why does Sedaris see the neighbor’s statement that Mr. Tomkey doesn’t believe in television as “a kind of test” for Sedaris’s family? (15)
2. How does Sedaris feel about his parents watching the news “and whatever came on after the news” after their statement that they don’t know if they believe in television either? (16)
3. Why does Sedaris spy on the Tomkeys to find out what the “something” is that they do instead of watching television? (16)
4. Why does Sedaris think that the Tomkeys “had no idea how puny their lives were”? (16)
5. Why does Sedaris believe that the Tomkey children “needed a guide,” but decide that he’d rather go on pitying them than help them? (17)
6. When the Tomkeys start spending time at the lake house, why does Sedaris feel as if his “favorite show had been canceled”? (17)
7. After the Tomkeys trick or treat, why does Sedaris feel that “they had turned my pity into something hard and ugly”? (20)
8. Why does Sedaris see his curiosity about the Tomkeys as his “gift” to them? (20)

### **FOR FURTHER REFLECTION**

- What do you think it means to believe, or not to believe, in television?
- Can television serve to make us look at ourselves, or does it necessarily distract us from ourselves?

# Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television

George Carlin

## Why does Carlin assert that there are “bad thoughts, bad intentions, but no bad words”? (23)

1. Why does Carlin begin by pointing out what proportion of the English language the seven forbidden words make up?
2. Why does Carlin say that while none of the seven forbidden words belong on the list, “you can understand why some of them are there”? (24)
3. Why does Carlin use the seven forbidden words so frequently in the selection?
4. Why does Carlin suggest substituting the word “fuck” for “kill” in movie clichés? (24)
5. Why does Carlin conclude with an example of “two-way words”? (24)

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Which of the seven words have you heard on television? How have television standards changed since Carlin performed this piece in 1972?
- Are there words that you think should never be heard on television?
- Why is violence more accepted on television than profanity?

## The Amiable Madness of *Green Acres*

Noel Murray

### Does Murray see *Green Acres* as an amiable diversion or as a critique of society at the time?

1. Why does Murray transition from the introduction of the essay by stating, “And then the sitcom became self-aware”? (25)
2. Why does Murray use the episode “I Didn’t Raise My Pig to Be a Soldier” to illustrate the “outright lunacy” of *Green Acres*? (26)
3. Why does Murray suggest that the show’s opening scene, in which the characters respond to the credit sequence, gives a good sense of “what kept the show grounded”? (26)
4. According to Murray, why does the show feature Arnold Ziffel, the pig, so often?
5. Does Murray suggest that television’s change from the “Day-Glo pop of the ’60s . . . into the earth tones and urban decay of the ’70s” was due more to TV networks’ decisions or to changes in society? (31)
6. Why does Murray end his reflection on the impact of *Green Acres* by saying, “In the process, our culture diffused the crazy. Or perhaps just absorbed it into our essence”? (31)

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Why is *Green Acres* a product of its time? Why are some television shows viewed as products of their time?
- Is it necessary for the audience to experience the “crazy” as well as “reality” in television programming?



# Brad Carrigan, American

George Saunders

## Why does the show keep getting “dumber” and “meaner”? (35)

1. Why do Doris, Chief Wayne, and Buddy repeatedly talk about what they have “learned” from the show’s incidents?
2. Why does Chief Wayne attribute Buddy’s apparent death to his “negative opinions”? (36)
3. When it is revealed that the participants on *FinalTwist* have just eaten their own mothers, why does Doris say, “What a riot”? (36)
4. Why do Doris and Chief Wayne say Brad is “insane” for suggesting they share some of the corn with the hungry? (41)
5. Why do Doris and Chief Wayne remain on the show as different characters?

## Why does Saunders end the story with Brad being written out of the show?

1. Why does Saunders give us access to Brad’s thoughts and feelings, and not those of the other characters?
2. Why does Saunders have Brad decide not to give the Filipino children any corn?
3. Are we meant to see Brad, Doris, Chief Wayne, and Buddy as real actors or as fictional characters?
4. Why does Brad feel he’s had an “incredible idea” after he thinks of making the show larger-hearted? (50)
5. At the end of the story, are we intended to think that Brad will succeed in passing his feeling of pity on to his next incarnation?

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Which elements of Saunders’ imaginary reality program do you find most believable, in light of current shows?
- Do you think audiences really want shows to be dumber and meaner?

## Empires of the New World (selection)

Pamela Douglas, interview with Ted Sarandos

### How does Sarandos reconcile Netflix's drive to be data-centric with its focus on creative freedom?

1. When Douglas asks what television is now, why does Sarandos respond with Morrow's quote about television being "flashing pictures in a box"? (65)
2. What effect does Sarandos say on-demand choice has in the creation of television shows?
3. Why do Sarandos and Douglas suggest that the model Netflix has established provides for better story creation?
4. Why does Sarandos call traditional television programming "ridiculous"? (61)
5. According to Sarandos, why does the Netflix model work better with serialized drama than with procedurals or sitcoms?

#### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- How should broadcast television change its programming model in response to streaming services like Netflix?
- How does binge watching affect the way we experience and participate in television stories?
- What do you think the future of television will look like?

# “Time to Go”: Dreaming of a Televised Future (selection)

Dade Hayes

## What does Hayes believe children’s television should be like?

1. Why does Hayes wonder if preschool television is “helping gradually to erode our notions of a literate society”? (75)
2. What is Hayes’s tone as he describes the focus group session for *Super Why!*?
3. To what extent is Hayes admiring of *Sesame Street* and to what extent is he critical of its future?
4. Is Hayes arguing that *In the Night Garden* is educational?
5. Why does Hayes end by describing his son’s reaction to watching *In the Night Garden*?

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Is there one best approach to children’s television?
- How have the internet and digital media devices changed children’s programming?

# Hasta Siempre

Jean Burnet

## What does Burnet learn from her abuela's relationship with television?

1. During her childhood, why does Burnet's family have three televisions even though they are "broke as hell"? (89)
2. Why does Don Francisco become "enmeshed in the fabric" of Burnet's family life? (91)
3. While Burnet's abuela is in the hospital, why does her family watch "digestible and easy" science fiction movies? (92)
4. Why does Burnet "wish more than anything" that her abuela could have seen the final episode of *Sábado Gigante*? (93)
5. Why does Burnet like to remember her abuela killing and plucking a chicken without taking her eyes off the television?

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- As a child, what did you learn about watching television with family members?
- Do you see television as a "strange window to somewhere new"? (94)
- To what extent is watching television a family event today?

## From “Lessons from Television”

Susan Stewart

### Does the poet suggest that the lessons we learn from television are helpful or harmful?

1. Why does the speaker repeat the line, “You must laugh at yourself, laugh and laugh”? (95)
2. Why does the speaker conclude that “emotion, therefore, is punctuation”? (95)
3. What does the speaker mean by the word “abatement”? Is the meaning the same both times it is mentioned? (95)
4. Why does the speaker say “A camera will light like a moth on disaster”? (97)
5. What does the speaker mean when saying “Your car is your face?” (97)
6. How does the speaker suggest class plays into viewing television?
7. Do the lessons in the poem suggest that television reflects or manipulates reality?

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Is it necessary for television to teach lessons?
- Does television reveal the true state of a society or transform it into entertainment?

## Pursuit of the Public Interest in the Vast Wasteland

Walter J. Podrazik

### **Why was the development of public television “almost the only practical response” to Minow’s call for television in the public interest? (108)**

1. According to Podrazik, what elements of Minow’s 1961 speech gave it an impact that “extended far beyond that day’s audience”? (99)
2. Why did the “broad influence” of television also feel “remarkably concentrated” in the 1950s? (101)
3. Why did 1950s television tend to “exacerbate the worst tendencies of popular culture formula packaging”? (101)
4. Why did Minow echo John F. Kennedy in asking broadcasters what their medium “can do for America”? (103)
5. Why does Podrazik conclude that public television continues to be “a welcome oasis in a vast wasteland”? (109)

### **FOR FURTHER REFLECTION**

- How many convergences of “popularity and quality” do you see in today’s television offerings? (105)
- Must television that is “constantly available” include some bad programming? (108)
- Do you agree that public television is an “oasis in a vast wasteland”? (109)

## What I Learned from Kristi Yamaguchi

Nicole Chung

### Why does watching Yamaguchi win the gold medal make Chung “increasingly aware of a wish I’d long harbored: to be seen”? (113)

1. Why does Chung call the “recognition” she and other Asian Americans felt while watching Kristi Yamaguchi on television “more than appreciation, more than fandom”? (111)
2. How does watching Yamaguchi help Chung deal with her feeling that, as an adopted Korean girl, she is seen as “a mistake”? (111)
3. After Yamaguchi’s victory, why does Chung write her first story with an Asian American protagonist?
4. Why does Chung include the quote from her Malaysian Chinese American friend who says it is “kind of sad that we all have the same youthful touchstones”? (114)
5. Why does Chung say that she wants her daughters’ sense of self-worth to “develop without the sting of such scarce representation”? (114)
6. Why does Chung conclude by saying that “we should all have more heroes from whom to choose”? (114)

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- How much progress do you think has been made since the 1990s in representation of diverse racial and ethnic groups on television?
- Are athletes more likely to become heroes to children than other people they see on television?
- When you were growing up, who did you identify with on television and why?

## Control (selection)

Frank Rose

**According to Rose, why is it a good thing that “the people who formerly constituted the audience are now capable of running off with the show”? (124)**

1. Why does Rose think that having *Mad Men* characters on Twitter “only exposes the yawning chasm between then and now”? (118)
2. In Rose’s view, why did the advent of digital media cause “the entire edifice of twentieth-century mass media” to start crumbling? (121)
3. What does Rose mean when he says, of television advertising, “the funnel is hopelessly, irretrievably busted”? (124)
4. Why does Rose think that that the practice of serial publication in the nineteenth century “inevitably . . . changed” the way stories were told? (127)
5. Why does Rose include the example of Dickens’ improvising in response to reader reactions to his novels? (128)
6. According to Rose, what is the “threat of immersiveness” that some critics see mass media as posing? (129)

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Do you agree that the potential for digital audience participation means that “movies and TV shows cease to be couch potato fodder and become catalysts for the imagination”? (122)
- How much control should an author be able to exert over the characters and stories he or she creates?
- Are there drawbacks to the kind of audience participation in storytelling that Rose describes?



## The Age of Show Business (selection)

Neil Postman

### Why does Postman believe that television has reshaped the American people to value entertainment above all else?

1. According to Postman, how does television redefine “the meaning of public discourse”? (136)
2. What distinction is Postman making between television as a technology and television as a medium?
3. Why does Postman say that we must not judge harshly those who present the news as entertaining, since they “must follow where their medium leads”? (139)
4. Why does Postman conclude that the program ABC aired after broadcasting *The Day After* shows that television cannot support “discussion as we normally use the word”? (141)
5. What does Postman mean when he says that television “encompasses all forms of discourse”? (143)
6. Why does Postman use the presidential debates as an example of how “the demarcation line between what is show business and what is not becomes harder to see with each passing day”? (144)

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Can television serve as “a medium of information and coherent discourse”? (139)
- Do you agree that television is “our culture’s principal mode of knowing about itself”? (143)
- How does the advent of digital technology affect Postman’s argument about the power of television and visual entertainment?

# Judge in Simpson Trial Allows TV Camera in Courtroom

David Margolick

**Focus question: Why does Judge Ito end up agreeing with those who argued that “television was essential” in the Simpson trial? (145)**

1. Why does Margolick open the article by referring to “the relief of millions of voyeurs, court buffs, and civic-minded students of the criminal justice system”? (145)
2. Why does Judge Ito only allow one camera in the courtroom?
3. Why does Judge Ito collect the letters from the public when he states that he doesn’t use “public opinion polls” to make decisions? (147)
4. What does Margolick mean when he writes that television “would help legitimize whatever the verdict is”? (146)
5. Why would the chief prosecutor, Marcia Clark, argue that cameras provide “the best way to refute unfounded rumors and wild, speculative theories’”? (146)
6. Why would one of Simpson’s lawyers emphasize showing the public that the “‘acquittal was based on evidence presented in a courtroom’”? (146)
7. Why would a lawyer for Court TV acknowledge that coverage in the case was “‘lurid, reckless, hysterical, beyond nonsense’” but add that “‘the camera pleads absolutely 100 percent not guilty’”? (146)
8. Why would Judge Ito want to create “a record of conscientiousness” regarding television coverage in this case? (147)

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Has television coverage of courtrooms tended to bolster or erode public faith in courts?
- Is television coverage of events inherently less biased than other forms of media?
- Why are people fascinated by television programs about true crime?

# To Remember History You Have to Repeat It

Tony Hoagland

## Is the speaker suggesting that the newscaster's presentation of troubling news protects viewers?

1. Why do the viewers comment on the woman newscaster's appearance instead of the news itself?
2. Why do suicide bombers and funerals "pass through" the newscaster's body?
3. Why does the speaker describe refugees as "waiting" at the newscaster's "border / like puppies waiting for adoption"?
4. Why does the speaker emphasize that the newscaster "never cries or laughs or mispronounces"?
5. Why does the speaker imagine the newscaster at home heating up her canned spaghetti?
6. Why does the speaker imagine pressing an ear against the newscaster's stomach and hearing "troop movements and weather reports"?
7. What is the poem proposing it means "to remember history"?
8. Why does the speaker say "We stand around her like children and listen"?
9. Why does the speaker compare the viewers to "wild beasts disguised as children"?

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- How does the presentation of TV news affect our understanding of history?
- Why do some TV newscasters inspire trust from viewers?
- Is it possible or desirable for newscasters to remain neutral about what they are reporting?

## The Moon Hours

E. B. White and others

### Does this collection of reports suggest that televising the first moon landing heightened or lessened its significance?

1. Why does White open with the line “The moon, it turns out, is a great place for men” but add that it’s “a poor place for flags”? (151)
2. Why does White suggest that we should have planted a limp white handkerchief instead of a flag?
3. Why did people crowd into the intersection of Sixth and Fiftieth Street to watch the moon landing on a fifteen-by-fifteen-foot screen in the rain instead of watching in their homes?
4. Why after Armstrong has set foot on the moon do viewers like those in the bowling alley return to their recreation?
5. Why does the barmaid say, “I can see you ain’t ready for the moon yet” to the patrons who want her to turn the channel? (154)
6. Why does the reporter relate that at the brownstone party in the East Nineties, “Many people seemed to want something to happen that was more exciting than what could really happen”? (159)
7. What does the girl in the last paragraphs mean when she says, “When you get blasé about people going to the moon, you *know* you’ve changed”? (160)

#### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What television events do people still watch live, and why?
- Does television provide a communal space in a disconnected world?
- Does television reporting of major historical events enhance their significance?
- Why are some people suspicious of events that have been televised?

## Getting Dirty

Mark Crispin Miller

### According to Miller, what motivates the Shield ad’s “sexless battle of the sexes” in the commercial for Shield? (171)

1. Why does Miller use the first person “we” and the present tense throughout his analysis?
2. Does Miller believe the seemingly simple Shield commercial is “intended to appeal to (and to worsen) some of the anxieties of modern life”? (168)
3. Why does Miller argue that the husband in the commercial is “actually Gail’s *wife*”? (169)
4. Why does Miller believe that the visual implications of the commercial are too precise to “have been merely accidental or unconscious”? (170)
5. Why does Miller compare Gail’s husband to a prostitute who “must satisfy a demanding trick”? (172)
6. What is the “mess” that Miller says the commercial “not only illuminates . . . but helps perpetuate”? (173)
7. Why does Miller include an afterword rebutting Danzig’s claim that Miller is reading too much into the commercial?

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Whose view of the commercial do you find more convincing, Miller’s or Danzig’s?
- How likely are viewers today to see the media image as “transparent”?
- Is it necessary for ads to worsen cultural anxieties in order to be effective?

## The First Presidential Debate (selection)

Alan Schroeder

### Why does Schroeder conclude that presidential debates “straddle the fault line between artifice and reality” more than anything else on TV? (191)

1. Why does Schroeder compare Kennedy and Nixon to “dueling divas”? (181)
2. Why does Schroeder begin by describing Nixon’s arrival at the debate location, as opposed to Kennedy’s?
3. Why did Nixon’s TV adviser, Ted Rogers, say that Nixon’s staff underestimated “the power of television”? (182)
4. Why does Schroeder describe Jacqueline Kennedy’s “Listening Party” as an “occasion for public relations”? (185)
5. Why does Schroeder describe the argument between the candidates’ representatives in the control room?
6. Why does Schroeder state that the moral of the Kennedy-Nixon debate is that “presidential debates are best apprehended as *television shows*, governed not by the rules of rhetoric or politics but by the demands of their host medium”? (190)
7. Why does Schroeder explain that “candidates and their handlers” leave nothing about the debates to chance, even though spontaneity is “perhaps *the* major reason” audiences watch presidential debates? (190)

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- How have televised presidential debates changed since the Kennedy-Nixon debate?
- Are televised presidential debates helpful to voters, or are they merely entertainment?
- What degree of influence do televised presidential debates still have in an age of social media?
- How would you describe “the power of television”?

# The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

Gil Scott-Heron

## Why does Scott-Heron repeatedly stress that “the revolution will not be televised”?

1. Why does Scott-Heron begin by directly addressing “you”? Who is the “you”? Is it the same “you” throughout?
2. Why does Scott-Heron say that “you will not be able to stay home, brother”?
3. Why does Scott-Heron say that “the revolution will not be brought to you by Xerox”?
4. Why does Scott-Heron say that not only will there be no pictures of white politicians like Nixon, but also no pictures of black civil rights leaders like Whitney Young and Roy Wilkins?
5. Why does Scott-Heron repeat the lines “There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down / brothers on the instant replay”?
6. Does the sixth stanza suggest that Scott-Heron thinks television will no longer be relevant to everyone or only to black people?
7. Does the fact that there “will be no pictures” of different events and “no highlights on the eleven o’clock news” mean that the revolution will not be news or that there will no longer be any television news at all?
8. According to Scott-Heron, why will the revolution “put you in the driver’s seat”?

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- To what extent can television play a significant role in shaping political movements?
- Do you think political revolutions today are more or less likely to be televised than Scott-Heron claims?

# The Missing Remote

Diane Lockward

## Why does the speaker of the poem take possession of the remote and say “You’ll never touch / those delicate buttons again”?

1. Why does a poem titled “The Missing Remote” begin with “Not lost or mislaid, but hidden”? Why does the speaker immediately acknowledge a role in the action?
2. Why does the speaker refer to the remote as “your baton”?
3. Why does the speaker compare the buttons of the remote to “miniature nipples”?
4. Why does the speaker make clear that the remote confers “power” and “force”?
5. Why does the speaker use the remote to “turn on and turn off . . . multiple times”?
6. Why does the speaker compare enjoying everything “in bits and pieces” to “nibbling / from a box of Godiva chocolates”?
7. Why does the speaker describe the person without the remote as “unfrocked”?
8. At the end of the poem, why is the speaker “spinning all over the globe” while the other person stretches out in a recliner?

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- How do you negotiate control over television viewing and content choices with others, such as spouses, roommates, or children?
- Who decides what types of television content you watch? How much power do you think you have over the viewing choices you make?
- Does the ability to watch through individual screens like phones and tablets make the experience of television more or less communal?



# Dolls and Feelings: Jill Soloway's Post-Patriarchal Television (selection)

Ariel Levy

## Why does Soloway say directing is “dolls and feelings”?

1. Why does Soloway say directing is “discerning-receiving”? (200)
2. Why does Soloway think that her job is “akin to being a good mom”? (200)
3. Why does Soloway think that women are “naturally suited to being directors”? (201)
4. How does Soloway believe her view of herself as “seditious” informs her work? (201)
5. Does Soloway advocate for directing with the “female gaze,” (200) or for not seeing gender as we do now? Can these ideas coexist?

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Can television shape and not merely reflect society? Should television effect change in society?
- How does the act of creation of a television series help the creator or reflect the creator's interests?

## Pop History on an Epic Scale: *Roots*

Donald Bogle

### Why was *Roots* an overwhelming success despite the belief that “dramatic portrayals of nonwhites held little appeal for most viewers”? (206)

1. Why does Bogle discuss how the *Roots* episodes became less “hokey” and more “forceful and urgent”? (205)
2. Why does Bogle say that “*Roots* became the type of cultural phenomenon that might never be duplicated”? (206)
3. Why did the executive Lou Rudolph think ABC “fooled the audience” by including “some white faces” in a few episodes? (207)
4. Why did the ABC executives finally decide to air *Roots* on eight consecutive nights?
5. Why did Fred Silverman, who “did not have enough faith” in the series, decide to air *Roots* in January, even though he was moved when he watched it? (208)
6. Why didn’t the success of *Roots* lead to a significant increase in serious black dramas?

#### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Do you think that networks still believe that “dramatic portrayals of nonwhites” hold little appeal to most viewers?
- Has television been able to duplicate the cultural impact of *Roots*?

## Desperately Selling Soda

Leslie Savan

**How does releasing *Like a Prayer* as a Pepsi ad convey “the pancultural ambitions of both soda pop and pop star”? (217)**

1. Why does Savan emphasize that Madonna was the first artist to debut a music video as a commercial?
2. Why does Savan describe both “the commercial version” and the “more daring mix” that aired on MTV? (218)
3. Why does Savan describe the commercial as “like a wet spot where all this season’s hot TV topics have condensed”? (219)
4. Why does Savan note that Madonna refused to do US ads, even though she later states “I like the challenge of merging art and commerce. As far as I’m concerned, making a video is also a commercial”? (220)
5. Why does Savan agree with the *Billboard* executive that Madonna is “a commercial character”? (220)
6. Why has the “*subtlety*” of the sell become the basis on which corporate-sponsored celebrities are judged? (220)
7. What does Savan think the *Billboard* executive’s comments inadvertently reveal “what’s wrong with the sense that corp-rock is inevitable”? (221)
8. Why are Pepsi and Coke “the medium[s] through which the word is passed”? (221)

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What is a “global teen”?
- Does the global nature of media today require that international artists “fly on that higher media plane”? (221)
- Do you think musicians “sell out” when they appear in advertising or allow their songs to be used to advertise a product?

## The TV

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Ben Loory

### **Why does the man begin to feel “a twinge of jealousy, and even, strangely enough, something that feels like fear” when he watches the man on-screen? (230)**

1. Why does the man begin to feel nauseated thinking about what his the man on-screen is doing?
2. Why does he wish that “there were some way he could choose what he does and does not do”? (233)
3. Why does the man take so long to recognize himself as the main character of the TV show?
4. Why does he feel “foolish to be so predictable, so reproducible”? (228)

### **Why is the man unable to free himself from the grip of the TV?**

1. Why does the man on-screen stop chewing on his lip?
2. Why is the man so curious about the list the man on-screen has created?
3. Why does the man decide that the best thing to do is to take the TV to the trash?
4. What does the man mean when he comments, “After all, if a man can’t recognize himself, what can he recognize”? (232)
5. At the end of the story, why does having “horribly chapped” lips strike the man as “the worst thing that has ever happened”? (235)

#### **FOR FURTHER REFLECTION**

- Is everything on television more fascinating by virtue of being on television?
- Does television control our lives?
- Do we look for ourselves in what we watch?

# Television, Reality, and Cold War Citizenship (selection)

Alan Nadel

## According to Nadel, why did most people in the 1950s see television as a “conduit to reality”? (241)

1. Why does Nadel emphasize the “visual power” of television? (238)
2. How did “unexpected” events validate the sense that television was real? (239)
3. What does Nadel mean when he says that audiences saw television as “the magic place where things were themselves”? (241)
4. Does Nadel think that Lucy Ricardo’s pregnancy was an example of televised reality or censorship?

## Why does Nadel say that watching television in the 1950s made one “the definitive citizen”? (245)

1. According to Nadel, how did television turn “normal” into a “national ideal”? (246)
2. What does Nadel mean when he says television was “a virtual arm of government propaganda”? (248)
3. Why does Nadel believe that the television-watching citizen understood that “his or her defining role was as a consumer”? (253)
4. Does Nadel believe that “watching television became a form of participation”? (256)

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Do people today consider what they see on television to be “real”?
- Does television now shape us into a particular type of citizen?
- Has our ability to skip advertisements changed the relationship of television audiences to consumerism?

## In the End, They Were Born on TV

Douglas Kearney

### What does it mean that the miscarriage is “exposition for reality TV”? (263)

1. Why are people in their houses on TV “ghosts haunting a house haunting houses”? (261)
2. Why are pregnant women also “haunted houses”? (261)
3. Who does the couple believe they’re helping by saying “yes” to TV? (262)
4. Why do the best ghosts not know “how not to be alive. / like being good at TV”? (263)
5. Why are the babies “born made of meats on TV”? Why does the language of the birth scene emphasize both its televised and fleshy qualities? (263)

### How does the speaker define “good TV”?

1. Why do the “people from TV” think the couple would be good TV? (261)
2. Why does the speaker say “to be good at TV make like TV isn’t”? (261)
3. Why is the pregnant woman “scared to be such good TV”? (262)
4. Why does the couple “want to be good TV”? (263)
5. Why does the speaker say “the demure camera good TVs up two meat babies into wailing ghosts”? (263)

#### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Can reality television “help” people?
- How does “good” relate to “real” on television?

## Why Is “Everyman” a White Guy?

Aziz Ansari

### Why does Ansari feel that the casting of Fisher Stevens as an Indian character in *Short Circuit 2* “mocked my ethnicity”? (266)

1. Why did seeing an Indian character in a leading role have such a powerful effect on Ansari as a child?
2. Why does Ansari come to feel that Stevens was not a “villain” for taking the role, but “a well-intentioned if slightly misguided young actor”? (266)
3. Why does Ansari describe Stevens’s efforts with the role as “admirable, despite the underlying insult of his being cast”? (266)
4. Why does Ansari include Stevens saying “several times” that the “role should have been played by an Indian and that he would never take it today”? (266)

### Why does Ansari acknowledge that casting Indian actors is “hard” but emphasize wondering “if we are trying hard enough”? (267)

1. Why does Ansari say that “fake Indians are still around more than you think”? (266)
2. Why does Ansari see a white stuntman performing for an Indian actor as “not mocking Indian people”? (267)
3. Why does Ansari emphasize that the “everyman” Hollywood is looking for is not “a straight white guy,” but “everybody”? (268)
4. Why does Ansari conclude by saying that Arnold Schwarzenegger is “an unsung pioneer for minority actors” who proved that audiences didn’t care if a character had an unusual accent? (268)

#### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- How much responsibility does television have to reflect social diversity?
- Do you think it is important that the ethnicity of actors match the ethnicity of the roles they are playing?

## Kim's Fairytale Wedding (selection)

Kate Durbin

### What is Durbin saying about the reality of the story by retelling it in this form?

1. Why does Durbin name some characters but give others labels?
2. Why does Durbin include brand names and describe the characters' appearances in such detail?
3. Who is the "We" in "We are back inside the rehearsal dinner"? Is it the same "We" in "We clap"? (272, 279)
4. Why does Durbin describe the Not-Husband as having a static body that food and drink fall through? Why does he fill the room with "crackling"? (274)
5. Why does the Not-Husband say, "All for real. Uncensored," when A Guy comes up to speak? (277)
6. Why does hearing A Guy tell the story of how Kim and the Not-Husband met make Kim say it "really kind of brings me back down to reality"? (278)
7. Why does Durbin describe the scene sequences at the beginning and end of the selection?

### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- How does seeing a written retelling of a televised story affect interpretation of the story? How can different media forms inform each other?
- Why are viewers interested in reality television show stars and their shows? If viewers know that the show is staged, does that affect their interest?