



## Reading 70

*You are going to read an extract from a textbook. For questions 34–40, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.*

### **BROADCASTING: The Social Shaping of a Technology**

'Broadcasting' originally meant sowing seeds broadly, by hand. It is, in other words, not only an agricultural metaphor, it is also one of optimistic modernism. It is about line 2 planned growth in the widest possible circles, the production, if the conditions are right, line 3 of a rich harvest. The metaphor presupposes a bucket of seeds at the centre of the activity, line 4 i.e. the existence of centralised resources intended and suited for spreading - and line 5 reproduction. The question to be looked into is why a new technology that transmitted words and pictures electronically was organised in a way that made this agricultural metaphor seem adequate.

Since television as a technology is related to various two-way forms of communication, such as the telegraph and the telephone, it is all the more striking that, from its very early days, it was envisaged as a centralised 'mass' medium. However, transmission to private homes from some centralised unit was simply in keeping with both socio-economic structures and the dominant ways of life in modern and modernising societies. Attempts or experiments with other forms of organisation in the long run remained just that - attempts and experiments. Two little-known, distinct alternatives deserve mentioning since they highlight what television might have been - in a different social context.

Experiments with two-way television as a possible replacement for the ordinary telephone were followed up, so to speak, by radio amateurs in Britain in the early 1930s. Various popular science journals, such as Radio News, had detailed articles about how to construct television transmitters and receivers and, throughout the 1930s, experimenting amateurs were active in many parts of the country. But Big Business, represented by the British Radio Manufacturers Association, in 1938 agreed upon standards for television equipment and channel regulations which drove the grass-roots activists out. And so there passed, at least in Britain, the historical 'moment' for a counter-cultural development of television as a widely diffused, grass-roots, egalitarian form of communication.

Broadcasting in some form was, however, tied not only to strong economic interests, but also to the deep structures of modern societies. In spite of the activities of TV amateurs, television was also primarily a medium for theatrical exhibition in the USA in the early 1930s, and as such often thought to be a potential competitor of the film industry. In fact, television was throughout the 1930s predominantly watched in public settings also outside of the USA. For example, in Britain, public viewing of television was the way in which most early audiences actually experienced the medium and this was even more the case in Germany. While the vision of grass-roots or amateur, two-way television was quite obviously doomed to a very marginal position at the very best, television systems largely based on collective public reception were in fact operating in several countries in the 1930s and may, with the benefit of hindsight, be seen as having presented more of a threat to the domestication of the medium. But it was a threat that was not to materialise.

Manufacturers saw the possibilities for mass sales of domestic sets as soon as the price could be reduced, and given the division and relation between the public and private domains fundamental to modernity, centralised broadcasting to a dispersed domestic audience was clearly the most adequate organisation of the medium. As working-class people achieved improved standards of living and entered 'consumer' society from about the 1920s onwards, the dreams of the home as a fully equipped centre for entertainment and diverse cultural experiences became realisable for the majority of inhabitants of Western nation-states. And all of this is now also happening on a global scale.

There is a clear relationship between the basic processes of social modernisation and the dominant structures of broadcasting. While social and economic modernisation meant increasing centralisation and concentration of capital and political power, the break-up of traditional communities produced new ways of life. Mobility was both social and geographical, and both forms implied that individuals and households were, both literally and metaphorically, 'on the move' in ways that left them relatively isolated compared to people in much more stable early communities. Centralised broadcasting was both an answer to the need felt by central government to reach all citizens with important information efficiently, and a highly useful instrument in the production of the harmonising, stabilising 'imagined community' of the nation-state.

The pervasiveness of these structured processes and interests rendered broadcasting the 'naturally' victorious organisation of both radio and television. What is left out here is the more positive view of broadcasting as a social form suitable also for democracy. In the formation of broadcasting policies between the World Wars, the interest in broadcasting as a means of securing equal access to resources necessary for conscious, informed and autonomous participation in political, social and cultural life played a very important role in many countries. Of course television is changing, and there is the risk that the very term broadcasting becomes outmoded or at least inadequate. In which case, this metaphor will be seen only as referring to a particular organisation of audio-visual technology during a certain centralised phase of social modernisation.

- 34 In the metaphor explored by the writer in the first paragraph, what does the 'bucket of seeds' represent?
- A planned growth
  - B a rich harvest
  - C the centre of the activity
  - D centralised resources
- 35 In the second paragraph, what view does the writer express about the way in which television developed?
- A It confirmed the results of experiments.
  - B It reflected other social trends.
  - C It was dominated by other technologies.
  - D It was limited by economic constraints.
- 36 The writer regards the experiments by radio amateurs in the 1930s as
- A a missed opportunity to use television technology in a different way.
  - B investigations into the commercial potential of television technology.
  - C a breakthrough in the development of new types of television transmitters.
  - D attempts to establish a more effective means of communication than the telephone.
- 37 Looking back, what does the writer feel about public viewings of TV in the 1930s?
- A They received a lot of opposition from the film industry.
  - B They were limited to small audiences outside the USA.
  - C They might have provided an alternative to the way broadcasting developed.
  - D They were less significant than the experiments with two-way television.
- 38 Transmission to people's homes became a dominant feature of television because
- A changes in society had created a demand for this.
  - B it became possible to manufacture televisions on a domestic scale.
  - C television audiences were seen as potential consumers of advertised goods.
  - D it was an effective way of delivering the programme schedules that people wanted.
- 39 In the sixth paragraph, the writer says that the authorities saw broadcasting as a means of
- A controlling the information that people received.
  - B accelerating the process of modernisation.
  - C boosting their own political influence.
  - D counteracting social upheaval.
- 40 In the final paragraph, what does the writer say he has omitted from his earlier analysis?
- A The factors that motivate people in the broadcasting industry.
  - B The resources needed to operate a broadcasting service.
  - C The capacity of broadcasting to empower people.
  - D The strength of the interests behind broadcasting.

# Reading 70 — Keys

- 34 D
- 35 B
- 36 A
- 37 C
- 38 A
- 39 D
- 40 C

## EXPLANATION

'Broadcasting' originally meant sowing seeds broadly, by hand. It is, in other words, not only an agricultural metaphor, it is also one of optimistic modernism. It is about planned growth in the widest possible circles, the production, if the conditions are right, of a rich harvest. The metaphor presupposes a bucket of seeds at the centre of the activity, **i.e. the existence of centralised resources** intended and suited for spreading - and reproduction. The question to be looked into is why a new technology that transmitted words and pictures electronically was organised in a way that made this agricultural metaphor seem adequate.

Since television as a technology is related to various two-way forms of communication, such as the telegraph and the telephone, it is all the more striking that, from its very early days, it was envisaged as a centralised 'mass' medium. However, **transmission to private homes from some centralised unit was simply in keeping with both socio-economic structures and the dominant ways of life in modern and modernising societies**. Attempts or experiments with other forms of organisation in the long run remained just that - attempts and experiments. Two little-known, distinct alternatives deserve mentioning since they highlight what television might have been - in a different social context.

Experiments with two-way television as a possible replacement for the ordinary telephone were followed up, so to speak, by radio amateurs in Britain in the early 1930s. Various popular science journals, such as Radio News, had detailed articles about how to construct television transmitters and receivers and, throughout the 1930s, experimenting amateurs were active in many parts of the country. But Big Business, represented by the British Radio Manufacturers Association, in 1938 agreed upon standards for television equipment and channel regulations which drove the grass-roots activists out. **And so there passed, at least in Britain, the historical 'moment' for a counter-cultural development of television** as a widely diffused, grass-roots, egalitarian form of

communication.

Broadcasting in some form was, however, tied not only to strong economic interests, but also to the deep structures of modern societies. In spite of the activities of TV amateurs, television was also primarily a medium for theatrical exhibition in the USA in the early 1930s, and as such often thought to be a potential competitor of the film industry. In fact, television was throughout the 1930s predominantly watched in public settings also outside of the USA. For example, in Britain, public viewing of television was the way in which most early audiences actually experienced the medium and this was even more the case in Germany. While the vision of grass-roots or amateur, two-way television was quite obviously doomed to a very marginal position at the very best, **television systems largely based on collective public reception were in fact operating in several countries in the 1930s and may, with the benefit of hindsight, be seen as having presented more of a threat to the domestication of the medium.** But it was a threat that was not to materialise.

Manufacturers saw the possibilities for mass sales of domestic sets as soon as the price could be reduced, and given the division and relation between the public and private domains fundamental to modernity, centralised broadcasting to a dispersed domestic audience was clearly the most adequate organisation of the medium. **As working-class people achieved improved standards of living and entered 'consumer' society from about the 1920s onwards, the dreams of the home as a fully equipped centre for entertainment and diverse cultural experiences became realisable** for the majority of inhabitants of Western nation-states. And all of this is now also happening on a global scale.

There is a clear relationship between the basic processes of social modernisation and the dominant structures of broadcasting. While social and economic modernisation meant increasing centralisation and concentration of capital and political power, the break-up of traditional communities produced new ways of life. Mobility was both social and geographical, and both forms implied that individuals and households were, both literally and metaphorically, 'on the move' in ways that left them relatively isolated compared to people in much more stable early communities. **Centralised broadcasting was both an answer to the need felt by central government to reach all citizens with important information efficiently, and a highly useful instrument in the production of the harmonising, stabilising 'imagined community' of the nation-state.**

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broadcasting as **a means of securing equal access to resources necessary for conscious, informed and autonomous participation in political, social and cultural life** played a very important role in many countries. Of course television is changing, and there is the risk that the very term broadcasting becomes outmoded or at least inadequate. In which case, this metaphor will be seen only as referring to a particular organisation of audio-visual technology during a certain centralised phase of social modernisation.