

# PUTTING TELEVISION IN ITS PLACE: THE DOMESTICATION OF THE TELEVISION SET IN BRITAIN 1936-1976

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how the television set was domesticated in Britain, from the beginning of the television service in 1936, to the introduction of colour in the 1970s. The thesis centres on the issue of television's domestic consumption, through the consideration of television as a physical object that resides *in* the home, not just as a disseminator of information *into* the home.

The thesis analyses source materials which depict the idealised versions of television domestication, such as lifestyle magazines, advertisements, marketing material, and exhibitions. These help us to understand the expectations that consumers had about television and its place in their homes. In addition, it uses two Mass Observation (MO) directives which provide insight into how people spoke about and documented the arrival of television.

The first section of the thesis examines how television's domestication was pre-figured in the ways in which television developed into a consumer good. It argues that it was within the process of commodification that television came to be understood as a consumer good destined for the home. The second section examines how television became part of ideal constructions of domesticity, showing that this negotiation was relational to the other objects and technologies shaping the home in this period. Furthermore, it argues that television's domestication created an idealised television lifestyle, which was aligned with wider imaginaries of domesticity, in particular around the notion of comfort.

# INTRODUCTION

The television set is one of the most ubiquitous household objects in Britain. Even as we are led to believe that it will be surpassed by newer, more portable screens, the majority of us still sit, evening after evening, staring at the box in the corner of the room. Television sets form part of our domestic landscapes, uniting and disintegrating domestic space, forming crucial locus points in our memories. When I was growing up in the 1990s, my grandma had a teak-finish Bang and Olufsen colour television set, which had a door that slid across the screen when it was not in use. On top of the set lived a set of ornaments. The one I remember most clearly is a model wind-up fairground carousel. As a child, this was the only television of this kind I had ever seen; it lived like a relic from a by-gone era in a home that was itself a monument to a certain vision of architecture and design. The house my grandma lived in was in many ways a typical example of the kinds of open plan homes built in suburbs across Britain in the 1950s and 60s. The through living-dining room, with large glass windows opening out to the street on one side and the garden on the other, was the exemplar of a new, modern way of life, which was expressed through design.

The television set stood out for me as a child because it was unfamiliar and, therefore, a novelty. When I was a child, televisions were made from plastic, usually grey or black, and certainly did not have a door. In the 1990s, as a nearly obsolete piece of technology, my grandma's television from the 1970s looked old-fashioned, more akin to a curiosity than a modern machine. Its meaning as a designed object had altered. Transformed by changing taste and technological advances in design, it was no longer the sleek, modern designer set it had been when it was bought. In the 1970s, Bang and Olufsen marketed their colour sets as the pinnacle of luxury colour receivers, for only the most discerning of consumers. An advert in 1971 opined that 'our products are made for people who like to own better things and Beovision colour is

simply the best you can buy.’<sup>1</sup> Two decades later, however, the set gave the room a look of the past, along with the other outdated objects and furniture that made up the room. My grandma, however, refused to upgrade to a modern flat-screen set, because, as she explained, where would she put the ornaments that lived on top of the TV?

Meanings of objects change over time. Television sets are more than just a means to watch television broadcasts, but become part of our lives, woven into our domestic experiences, forming relationships with us and the other objects around them. We should pay more attention to these taken for granted objects and uncover their hidden histories, reassessing the impact they have had on our everyday lives. This thesis provides a cultural history of the television set’s relationship with the home. It asks: how was television domesticated in Britain, from 1936 until 1976? It examines how television developed from an invention into a commodity destined for the home, through how sets were designed, manufactured and marketed. It will then consider how television sets were ideally integrated into constructions of domesticity by examining how television owners were advised to position television sets within their homes.

The time frame begins with television’s initial introduction as a commodity and domestic medium in the 1930s. The starting date for the thesis – 1936 – marks the beginning of a regular BBC television service. It would be possible to extend this study back to the 1920s, when television was first publicised as an invention in Britain,<sup>2</sup> but I have chosen to focus on the point after which the television service was available on a regular basis, as this marks the

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<sup>1</sup> “Beautiful Bang and Olufsen,” Bang and Olufsen, advertisement, *Homes and Gardens* (November 1971), 5.

<sup>2</sup> As Knut Hickethier discusses, dating television’s pre- and early histories can be a complicated task, as there is an argument for television’s pre-history beginning in the mid-seventeenth century. He defines a second period between 1890-1910 when inventors began to think about sending pictures over a long distance and there was talk of ‘television’ and a third period between 1910 and 1933, when television was developed and actively promoted. See Knut Hickethier, “Early TV: Imagining and Realizing Television” in *A European Television History*, eds. Jonathan Bignell and Andreas Fickers (London: Blackwell, 2008), 55-78.

moment when television, as a medium, transitioned from the experimental phases into a viable, and more stable, form of domestic entertainment. This regular service, however, was halted at the outbreak of the Second World War and only resumed in 1946, received by only a few thousand viewers, in a period of post-war austerity and shortages, but television gradually began to diffuse as a commodity and entered into the British home.<sup>3</sup> The mass proliferation of television occurred in the mid-1950s as austerity eased off and there were more ways to obtain a television, including hire purchase and rental options. It was in the early 1950s that television came to be understood primarily as a domestic medium, with set makers focusing on designing and selling sets for a home market.<sup>4</sup> One million licenses were sold by 1951 and the BBC surveys began to point towards a greater preponderance among lower income households.<sup>5</sup> Rob Turnock points to 1954-1964 as a significant period of growth, when ‘the number of television licenses held in the United Kingdom, with one license per household, rose from just over 3 million to almost 13 million, effectively a national audience.’<sup>6</sup> In 1967, colour television was introduced, but it would take nine years for colour television licenses to overtake black and white ones, which is when the time period for this thesis will draw to a close.<sup>7</sup> By 1976, television was a firmly entrenched national pastime, fully embedded in domestic patterns of living. The government’s General Household Survey, published in April 1976, showed that 90% of Britons chose television as their main leisure activity, with women watching an average of 20 hours per week and men 17 hours.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Joe Moran, *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History of Britain in Front of the TV* (London: Profile Books, 2013), 52.

<sup>4</sup> As opposed to public spaces, like pubs, clubs and cinemas (where there was also an emergent market), see Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Tim O’Sullivan, “Post-War Television in Britain: BBC and ITV,” in *The Television History Book* ed. Michelle Hilmes (London: BFI, 2003), 31.

<sup>6</sup> Rob Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture: Britain and the Transformation of Modernity* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Moran, *Armchair Nation*, 202.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

The thesis takes the long view of television's domestication to allow for comparisons over time about the place of television in the home; there are some problems that are short-lived, while others remain constant. Andreas Fickers has contended, in his research on transnational television in Europe, that we need to describe 'the changeable nature' of media 'in a long term historical perspective,' because television is a 'constantly changing, fluid field.'<sup>9</sup> The spread of television across Britain was not even; services took time to reach the north of England and Scotland, and thus it is only for the late 1950s that we can talk of full coverage in Britain. Extending the time span to include colour television also provides a logical point of comparison as the medium updated. It gives us an opportunity to assess what changed in the way television was spoken about and how the language of television's consumption changed or remained the same. This long timespan allows for the effects of domestication to be realised, and for a better understanding of the changing relationship between home and television as the medium became more commonplace.

Television's relationship with domesticity is symbiotic and pervasive; television in Britain has been primarily consumed within the home. Television, by the 1960s, had already become 'a basic amenity, like electric light or tap water [...] in seven British homes out of ten, a bluish-grey flicker radiated through the front window each night.'<sup>10</sup> Roger Silverstone contends that:

Television is a domestic medium. It is watched at home. Ignored at home [...] But it is part of our domestic culture in other ways too, providing in its programming and its schedule models and structures of domestic life, or at least of certain versions of

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<sup>9</sup> Andreas Fickers, "The Birth of Eurovision: Transnational Television as a Challenge for Europe and Contemporary Media Historiography" in *Transnational Television History: A Comparative Approach*, eds. Andreas Fickers and Catherine Johnson (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 15-16.

<sup>10</sup> Moran, *Armchair Nation*, 147.

domestic life. It is also a means for our integration into a consumer culture through which our domesticity is both constructed and displayed.<sup>11</sup>

Through an historical exploration of the place of television in constructions of the British home in the post-war period and the following decades, this thesis will enter debates about the formation of the modern British home and the role that media played in this. It will consider television as doubly articulated: it both streams information into the home and lives within it as a physical object. Television's position as a domestic object-technology should not be taken for granted, nor seen as inevitable.

This thesis will examine how television's domestication was pre-figured in how television was commodified, to interrogate more closely how television developed from an invention into an object-technology that came to be primarily consumed within the home. This will involve an analysis of how television was positioned as a desirable consumer good and how it was understood by consumers as a desirable commodity. Consumers had to find *value* in owning a television and make the decision to welcome it into their homes. It was only after television had been obtained – by purchase or rental – that it then had to be integrated into the home. This process of integration was vital to television's domestication and will form the focus of the second part of the thesis. Television's acceptance in the home depended upon it being introduced into households as a beneficial technology, rather than a negative one, therefore, this thesis will examine how this process was mediated in the visual culture and discourses around television's emergence.

Given that television's domestication was not inevitable, it will be necessary to uncover the various influences which drove this process. This will involve looking at the multiple ways in

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<sup>11</sup> Roger Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life* (London and New York: Routledge 1994), 24.

which it was mediated through lifestyle magazines, design publications, marketing material, exhibitions, and trade fairs. Through this, the thesis will provide a broader picture of the kinds of agendas and interests involved in ensuring television was domesticated in a certain way, and how the television lifestyles that persist today were not random but created both in-line with, and against, certain middle class, ‘tasteful,’ gendered versions of consumer practices and domesticity. Taking such an approach will avoid a technological deterministic vantage point for television’s development as an object-technology. The idea that technologies determine societies rather than vice versa has frequently been critiqued in studies of technologies and their uses, which favour an approach that looks at the various forces that shape the paths that technologies take.<sup>12</sup> Johnathan Sterne writes that:

To study technologies in any meaningful sense requires a rich sense of their connection with human practice, habitat, and habit. It requires attention to the fields of combined cultural, social, and physical activity—what other authors have called networks or assemblages—from which technologies emerge and of which they are a part.<sup>13</sup>

Histories of early British television have tended to focus on institutions, particularly the BBC, or technical histories only.<sup>14</sup> This thesis will offer an alternative perspective on the early stages of television and its development, forging connections between television’s pre-war development and its post-war proliferation. There is room for more joined up thinking about how medium and technology fused in these early stages and how medium, technology and

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<sup>12</sup> Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003 [1974]); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003); Jennifer Daryl Slack, *Communication Technologies and Society: Conceptions of Causality and the Politics of Technological Intervention* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1984).

<sup>13</sup> Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 8

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vols. 1-5* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961-79); Stephen Herbert, *A History of Early TV: Volume 1* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

place (i.e. domestic space) became intertwined. Fickers suggests that the term ‘dispotif’ is a useful way to think about how we might successfully analyse ‘the triangular communicative relationship between the television set, the channel (i.e. the content) and the recipient (i.e. the viewer).’<sup>15</sup> This more systematic understanding of media history, Fickers argues, allows for greater interdisciplinarity, as it is possible to uncover the ‘complex relationship between the material, institutional and symbolic dimensions of a medium or media system.’<sup>16</sup> Laying emphasis on the material, this thesis aims to discover new avenues into historicising the domestication of television in Britain.

Such an approach to media history follows on from research into the visual and material culture of television and its domestic articulation, which has become more common since the 1990s. Lynn Spigel pioneered this type of media history in her book *Make Room for TV*.<sup>17</sup> Spigel examined how households in the United States were expected to respond to the arrival of television into their homes, how magazines were instrumental in instructing people (especially women) on how to adopt the new medium, and how television became a key part of family life. Spigel’s work assessed the ways in which the arrival of media into the home was shaped by issues of gender and class. Through this kind of exploration Spigel showed how women were expected to negotiate the arrival of television in the home. Television was at once presented as a positive, homogenizing influence that could recapture the spirit of American family life, while simultaneously as a threat that could bring outside influences into the heart of the domestic sphere.

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<sup>15</sup> Fickers, “The Birth of Eurovision,” 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Post-war America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).

Spigel's sustained and empirical work on the early years of television's domestication has laid the foundation for similar studies. In a British context, Helen Wheatley and Deborah Chambers have both researched the television set as a material object, including how it was designed and manufactured and how it was framed in the ideal home. Tim O'Sullivan has laid out some of the considerations that are necessary for work on television and the home in Britain. He writes:

An adequate history of British television in the period under review must engage with the ways in which television – one of the most decisive cultural technologies of the post-war period – entered the culture of the British 'home,' and with how television viewing cultures became established and 'domesticated' British TV.<sup>18</sup>

He lays out the findings from a qualitative research project, which asked a small sample of respondents about their memories of television. In his conclusions, he draws the links between habitus, cultural capital and cultures of viewing, explaining that the discussions demonstrated that 'the introduction and use of television in different households, and the contrasting ways in which it was managed and evaluated, were mediated in relation to [...] distinctive codes of cultural capital.'<sup>19</sup> He is drawing attention to the fact that television's place within the home is dependent on an interplay between wider cultural value and how households choose to appropriate or reject these codes in order to identify themselves as a certain kind of consumer. O'Sullivan returns to this topic in an article in 2007, in which he advocates a better understanding of exactly how television entered the British home and became embedded within everyday life:

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<sup>18</sup> Tim O'Sullivan, "Television Memories and Cultures of Viewing, 1950-1965" in *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History*, ed. John Corner (London: BFI, 1991), 159.

<sup>19</sup> O'Sullivan, "Television Memories and Cultures of Viewing," 172.

We also need to come to terms more effectively with the ways in which television was itself ‘imaged’ and mediated to potential audiences in the period: in short, the ‘hand in glove’ of how television was culturally framed and represented and how the demand for television was ‘cultivated.’<sup>20</sup>

O’Sullivan draws out two important strands, which this thesis will pursue: how television’s domestication was dependent on how it was ‘culturally framed’ in contemporary discourse and how this was articulated through specific cultural codes and possibly instrumental in creating them. Yet beyond a small study on memories of television, O’Sullivan himself is yet to offer any research that pertains to the questions that he raises in these two articles.

Spigel’s research into the mediation of the arrival of television in the United States by popular media will be an invaluable forerunner to my research, but adjustments must be made to fit the British context. One important contextual factor is that post-war Britain was a time of austerity and shortage, which did not ease until the mid-1950s, while the United States did not suffer such setbacks in the same period. The ability of consumers to afford luxury items like television sets, and the availability of sets, took more time in Britain than in the United States. Another important difference is that, in Britain, television’s connection to consumer culture has always been subject to ambivalence. Johnson and Turnock have highlighted how commercial television channel ITV, which began broadcasting in 1955 in Britain, has received little academic attention because it is perceived as lacking in quality in comparison to the BBC, which is funded by a licence fee paid by viewers.<sup>21</sup> Television’s connection to consumer culture post-1955 has been explored by scholars like Rob Turnock, who argues that the two have a

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<sup>20</sup> Tim O’Sullivan, “Researching the Viewing Culture: Television and the Home 1946-60” in *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*, ed. Helen Wheatley (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 167.

<sup>21</sup> Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock, eds., *ITV Cultures: Independent Television Over Fifty Years*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2005).

firmly entrenched relationship.<sup>22</sup> The television set, however, has a far longer relationship with consumer culture than broadcast television. In order to watch television in the home it was always necessary to acquire a television set, usually by buying or renting one. The television set is a consumer good and thus embeds television in consumer culture in more multifaceted ways than just how television content is funded. This is one of the ways in which a focus on the material object of the television set allows us greater insights into the relationship between television and home. Berker et al. write that by ignoring television's materiality and simply looking at the images on screen and why they were made, 'we ignore its role as a totemic object of enormous symbolic importance in the household.'<sup>23</sup>

By taking a material cultural approach to television's history, this thesis builds on sociological scholarship on the social lives of objects and their meanings.<sup>24</sup> Objects are not static, but, through their use, they gain biographies much the same as people do. This objectification is made in the context of consumption, indeed Daniel Miller defines consumption as 'simply a process of objectification.'<sup>25</sup> How we use objects, and the resulting biography of an object, therefore, tells us about how people, households and societies give value and meanings to things, and group themselves accordingly around the value given to the consumption of certain things.

Moving beyond the theoretical, this thesis applies these ideas historically, for which it will be necessary to draw on work by cultural and social historians researching the British home across the twentieth century. Especially important will be work on the design of the British home and

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<sup>22</sup> Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture*.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Berker, Yves Punie and Maren Hartmann, *Domestication of Media and Technology* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>24</sup> Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (London: Allen Lane, 1979); Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, 27.

the importance of objects and consumption practices to the meaning of home and the identity of the people living within it.<sup>26</sup> This also provides the context for television; we must seek to understand the space (both real and imagined) that the television entered into and became a central part of. It is possible to trace how, through the processes of domestication, connotations of gender, taste and class became attached to the television set and the way it was used.

## SITUATING THE TELEVISION SET: CORE THEMES AND QUESTIONS

There are several core questions and themes that arise as crucial to the exploration of television's domestication. A focus on television as an object draws attention to television's relationality to the existing material culture of the home. Television's positioning as a consumer good for the home rested upon a shifting cultural logic towards domestication that had been taking place since the Victorian era, becoming particularly strong from the interwar period onwards. Technology was a driving force for making the home a more comfortable and hospitable place, in particular the introduction of electricity, certain labour-saving devices, and home entertainment media, like the gramophone and radio. These technologies all helped to shape constructions of the ideal home as a clean, comfortable realm away from spheres of work. These older technologies all had to undergo a process of domestication, in which they were adapted for their domestic reception. Furthermore, television was largely manufactured by firms that were already producing radio receivers for the home, which then informed how television receivers were manufactured and designed as domestic objects, as Keith Geddes has explored in his extensive study of the manufacture of radio and early television sets.<sup>27</sup> Shaun Moores highlights how social surveys pointed to 'radio as part of a general move away from the collective occupation of exterior space towards a family grouping which had withdrawn to

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<sup>26</sup> Judy Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home: Writings on Popular Design and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Penny Sparke, *As Long as its Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (Nova Scotia: NSCAD publishing, 2010 [1995]); Daniel Miller, "Appropriating the State on the Council Estate," *Man: New Series* 23, No.2 (June 1988): 353-372.

<sup>27</sup> Keith Geddes and Gordon Bussey, *The Setmakers: A History of the Radio and Television Industry* (London: BREMA, 1991).

interior space.’<sup>28</sup> These earlier examples paved the way for television’s acceptance in the home. Television’s formulation into a domestic commodity and its integration into the home needs to be viewed as one of many objects and technologies that shaped the twentieth century British home. Television’s relationality to older technologies and other forms of material culture in the home, particularly furniture, will be a central theme that runs throughout the thesis. There were, however, elements of television’s domestication that were exceptional. As an audio-visual medium, which had to be seen as well as heard, it required extra consideration around lighting and seating, unlike radio which could be listened to from anywhere in the room. Television had the potential to serve as a disrupting force to the visual-material culture of the home, as well as a positive addition.

The construction of the ideal home was, in many ways, connected to consumer culture, as the means to achieving it was usually through purchasing specific goods and services. Utilities like gas and electricity were only nationalised after the Second World War, beginning their domestic lives as commodities, rather than necessities. The television set also developed into a commodity that was designed to make the home a better place to be, thus another central theme of this thesis is the multiple ways in which television was rooted in consumer culture through its domestication. This is especially pertinent given that consumer culture was becoming more pervasive and sophisticated at the time at which television was emerging as a domestic medium in the 1950s. Television has often been viewed as a means by which consumer culture was promoted, but consumer culture also had a role to play in ensuring television’s success as a household object-technology. The content of British television may have been shaped by the public service broadcasting remit, but the manufacture and sale of television receivers – a necessary aspect of receiving television content – followed the more

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<sup>28</sup> Shaun Moores, “The Box on the Dresser: Memories of Early Radio and Everyday Life,” *Media, Culture and Society* 10, no.1 (January 1988): 25.

conventional path of a commodity. Television's relationship with consumer culture was a key aspect in television's development, intrinsic to how it advanced as a domestic object-technology, and thus instrumental in how the medium also formed. To view the advent of commercial television in 1955 as an aberration, or fundamental change of direction for television in Britain, fails to consider the complex ways in which television in Britain was shaped by consumer culture, which becomes evident when exploring how the television set was positioned as a consumer good, which became an integral part of the home.

The prominence of consumer culture put more emphasis on lifestyle and taste, both of which were tied to consumption practices. The home was becoming an increasingly important space in the twentieth century and how it looked became a means of reflecting the lifestyles and identities of its inhabitants. Television's domestic positioning tied it into these constructions of lifestyle and taste, which is another recurrent theme throughout the thesis. After the Second World War, a new focus on 'good' design roused debates about 'good' and 'bad' taste and how to achieve the former and avoid the latter. In 1944, the Council of Industrial Design (CoID) was established to preside over these questions and instruct the nation accordingly. The CoID were heavily involved in the Festival of Britain (1951), a key cultural event in Britain's post-war life, where new ways of living were put on show. Television played a central role at the exhibition, which is an example of one of the ways in which television's physical appearance became part of narratives about design, taste and lifestyle in the post-war period. Television sets were designed objects, that lived like furniture within the home, thus how they looked and how they were sited within the home was a design issue. As a result of this, television sets became part of how the ideal home was constructed; the television set and where it went had the potential to express a household's lifestyle choices and taste.

Social and design historians have argued that this emphasis on the consumption of lifestyle was intertwined with class identity; consumer choices, more than what job you have, became the means of class distinction.<sup>29</sup> Through examining what the domestication of television reveals about taste and lifestyle, this thesis will be interested in the ways in which television's consumption played into how class distinction manifested itself in the decades following the Second World War. It will be concerned with how television consumption was fashioned as a means to express class identity, rather than excavating actual ownership of television sets among different class groups. While this would be beneficial for a social history of television's consumption, the task here is to consider television's cultural history.<sup>30</sup> Rather than seeing class as a fixed or stable entity, this thesis is interested in how class identity was represented and discussed *in relation* to television, as this offers insight into how the consumption of television played into wider trends around identity, consumer culture and domesticity.

The construction of the ideal home through consumer culture was dependent upon the female figure of the housewife, who was framed as chief consumer and the manager of how the home looked and was run. It is necessary to ask, therefore, how television's domestication was dependent upon specific constructs of gender, in particular, the positioning of women as housewife and consumer. This was a well-established configuration for women, with roots in the development of domesticity which coincided with the industrial revolution. Janet Winship has contended that, in the nineteenth century, 'the clothes a woman wore and the contents and arrangement of her home were, on the one hand, signs of her husband's wealth and class position, on the other, signs of her own feminine accomplishments.'<sup>31</sup> In the 1950s, because

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<sup>29</sup> Stephen Brooke, "Class and Gender" in *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change*, eds. Francesca Carnevali and Julie-Marie Strange (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2007); Sparke, *As Long as its Pink*.

<sup>30</sup> This can be seen as part of the wider 'cultural turn', in which the 'stuff' of class and the politics of consumption considered, of which Pierre Bourdieu was a leading exponent. For more discussion see Mike Savage "The Fall and Rise of Class Analysis in British Sociology, 1950-2016" *Tempo Social*, 28: 2 (2016), 57-72.

<sup>31</sup> Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* (New York: Pandora Press, 1987), 60.

there was such a huge array of products to choose from, ‘making the right choice, according to the ads, brought you success as housewife and mother.’<sup>32</sup> The tasks of the housewife both transformed and increased. As Mark Abrams wrote in 1959, ‘since now home has become the centre of his activity and most of his earnings are spent on or in the home his wife becomes the chooser and spender and gains a new status and control – her tastes form his life.’<sup>33</sup> It was likely, therefore, that women would have a role to play in the consumption of television, given that it was an important consumer desirable, that quickly went from status symbol to household necessity, often purchased before other household items such as fridges, vacuum cleaners and washing machines.<sup>34</sup> Scholars have already shown that women were considered a key factor in the acceptance of radio, with programming shaped around supposedly female interests. Shaun Moores and Maggie Andrews have both noted how the conception of broadcasting and its role in the domestic sphere revolved around the female listener.<sup>35</sup> Moores writes:

Women’s relationship to radio was to go through a transformation which would re-position them at the centre of the broadcasting audience [...] There was the formation of broadcasting discourses which constructed their audience as ‘the family’ and addressed the mother as monitor of domestic life. There was the scheduling of programmes around the mother’s daily routines.<sup>36</sup>

This was echoed in patterns of television programming. Scholars of television have also emphasised how broadcast television was formulated around women’s domestic routines, with

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in *ibid*, 43.

<sup>34</sup> Sue Bowden and Avner Offer, “The Technological Revolution That Never Was: Gender, Class and the Diffusion of Household Appliances in Interwar England” in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, eds. Victoria De Grazia and Ellen Furlough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> Moores, “The Box on the Dresser”; Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Moores, “The Box on the Dresser,” 31.

an awareness of the rhythms of family life.<sup>37</sup> In addition to this, Helen Wheatley has argued that how the television set was positioned as a consumer good in the ideal home was also gendered, with women appealed to in their capacity as housewife and consumer. This thesis will also position gender, in particular women, as a running theme in the exploration of the take-up and integration of the television set in the home.

Through its exploration of the domestication of television, the thesis locates television history within discourses around domesticity, lifestyle, taste, class and gender, building hitherto unseen connections that are exposed when the material articulation of television is examined. Television's history in Britain is thus situated as intrinsically related to the development of the mid-century British home and vice versa.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to excavate how television was domesticated in Britain, this thesis deploys an archive-based method. I have sought out source material that might reveal how television was 'culturally framed and represented,'<sup>38</sup> looking for evidence in this framing of how television was presented as a commodity and the ways in which it was situated within constructions of domesticity. This has largely involved locating source material that is focused on the domestic, including lifestyle magazines with a concern for the home, exhibitions with a domestic focus and design publications. In addition to this, I have found promotional material for television receivers, including brochures, shop leaflets and advertisements. I have tried to focus on material that deals with television in relation to domesticity, which would conceptualise television as a material object and commodity, not only as a medium. In addition to this, I have used two Mass Observation (MO) directives, from 1949 and 2003 respectively, which both

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<sup>37</sup> Janet Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture: Men, Women and the Box* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood, eds., *Television for Women: New Directions* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> O'Sullivan, "Television Memories and Cultures of Viewing," 172.

focused on television, to uncover how respondents spoke about and remembered the impact of television on their domestic lives.

Tracing how the home was historically lived in, both in terms of its appearance and its day to day existence, is a difficult task, even for a time period as recent as the era of television. Evidence of a home's everyday existence does not gain systematic official documentation, so while it might be possible to trace housing policy, housing schemes and architectural planning, tracing how homes were framed and understood as social, emotional and everyday spaces can be more of a challenge. Magazines, exhibitions, promotional material and trade fairs provide evidence of how homes were represented and how ideals about the home were made manifest in visual culture. These will form a significant portion of my source material for the thesis for a variety of reasons. Not least, they show us how television was expected to fit into established constructions of domesticity, but also how television might be expected to alter them. It is important to highlight, however, that they can tell us about representations of television's domestication rather than its actual domestication.

In addition to this, the source material that has remained privileges a largely top-down narrative about television's domestication so it is also important to recognise that the sources I use here provide a largely middle-class narrative. As Roberta Pearson has acknowledged in her work on New York City Nickelodeons in the early twentieth century, the scarcity of non-top down sources for media historians presents problems around the narratives of history that we create.<sup>39</sup> By privileging these sources, we can end up creating a hierarchy of causes, rather than taking

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<sup>39</sup> Roberta E. Pearson, "Conflagration and contagion: eventilization and narrative structure," *Screening the Past*, 1999, available at <http://www.screeningthepast.com/2014/12/conflagration-and-contagion-eventilization-and-narrative-structure/>. See also, Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio "Corruption, Criminality and the Nickelodeon", in *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, eds. Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson and Jane Shattuc (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).

into account a more pluralistic set of circumstances. To counteract this, Pearson argues that we should embrace methodologies that function more like polyhedrons:

Conventional historiographic practices insist upon the best possible interpretation of a series of historical events, while the polyhedron of eventalization permits multiple access points and multiple interpretations, one no more valid than another.<sup>40</sup>

I will use this methodology to lay out how I will use my source material to answer the question of how television was domesticated, discussing how they allow insight into television's place within constructions of the ideal home. However, given the myriad of sources that I have uncovered, I will demonstrate how such an approach does go some way to creating the 'polyhedron' effect that Pearson speaks of, providing a broad study of the various discourses that framed television's domestication.

Some material I have looked at was specifically from the interwar period, which was used to uncover television's development into a commodity providing evidence of how television was understood as a technology in its earliest stages, when it was still a niche object. My decision to include the interwar period in my research was informed by a three month placement I undertook with the National Science and Media Museum, where I worked with the Pye archives and the *Daily Herald* picture library. In these archives, I found a large amount of material that related to television's development in the interwar period, including press photographs of early television sets being made in factories and at interwar exhibitions, as well as promotional material for pre-1939 sets. To supplement this material, I have looked at pre-war magazines about radio and television. For this I rely on *Practical and Amateur Wireless*, a

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

technical magazine, which has proved to be an informative source for demonstrations; it includes listings and reports from demonstrations in the pre-war period, as well as reports from Radiolympia and other exhibitions. As a technical journal, aimed largely at men, it configures an ‘expert user’, who will be interested in the technological details of television, focusing on television, like radio before it, as a gadget. I have also referred to a *Radio Times* special edition on television from 1936, which introduced readers to the new medium. Given that it was under the editorial control of the BBC, it was interested in television as an extension of radio and provided, among other things, a listing service for programmes.

A pre-war exhibition entitled ‘Television,’ which went on show at the Science Museum in London in 1937, put television on display, introducing visitors to the technology and medium. This exhibition has received little academic attention in terms of its place in the early history of television. The Science Museum’s 1937 annual report estimated that the exhibition received one quarter of a million visitors and that 10,000 exhibition handbooks were sold, making it an important site of introduction to television.<sup>41</sup> The Science Museum documentation centre holds the exhibition brochure, alongside images and committee meetings for the exhibition, all of which provide insight into how television was framed to visitors at the exhibition. As with many of the early exhibitions that demonstrated television, the exhibition took place in London, making it an example of how television’s early presentation took place in only a small geographical region.

The annual trade exhibitions that I look at span the twentieth century, providing evidence of how television was first put on display and its re-emergence as a commodity in the post-war

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<sup>41</sup> Science Museum, *Annual Report* (1937), 11. Science Museum Documentation Centre, London. ED 79/178.

period. I focus on Radiolympia,<sup>42</sup> and the *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition, both of which construct ‘imagined users’ of television. Radiolympia (1926-1965) was an annual trade show at Olympia, London, which promoted new radio and television receivers. Compared to other contemporary exhibitions, it is hard to find information about, but I have found material related to the exhibitions in magazines (such as reviews of shows in *Practical and Amateur Wireless*, *Ideal Home* and CoID publication *Design*) and some surviving images from the National Science and Media Museum *Daily Herald* picture archive. The *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition (1908-) offers us insight into how television was positioned in the ideal construction of home. The annual exhibition was aimed at lower middle class housewives, providing them with an array of consumer products to peruse and models of ideal rooms and buildings of the latest home designs. It was usually attended by a member of the Royal Family, including Queen Elizabeth II, and contemporary celebrities, including models and film and television actors. An archive containing Ideal Home Exhibition catalogues and press photographs is held at the V&A art and design archives in London. This annual exhibition was held either at the Olympia Exhibition Centre or Earl’s Court in London. Helen Wheatley summarises the objectives of the exhibition:

Its aims have remained constant throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century: to bring together the consumer goods and advice needed to construct the ‘ideal home,’ focusing on food cookery, furniture and decoration, showcasing both the latest inventions for the modern house, including evolving media technologies, and the latest housing designs.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> It is also known as National Radio Show, but for the sake of consistency I will use Radiolympia throughout the thesis.

<sup>43</sup> Helen Wheatley, “Television in the Ideal Home” in *Television for Women: New Directions*, eds. Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 205-222.

To further assess how television was positioned as a consumer good for the home, I will utilise promotional material, including marketing brochures issued by television manufacturers, from the National Science and Media Museum archive, as well as advertisements, found in lifestyle magazines and from the History of Advertising Trust. I have uncovered a small amount of material in the John Lewis Partnership archive relating to how their department stores sold television sets. From across these sources, I have found examples from the interwar period up until the mid 1970s for colour television sets. These are a useful tool for understanding how manufacturers, through marketing, promoted their wares and aimed to entice consumers, positioning television as a consumer good destined for the home.

To explore television's domestication in the post-war period I have relied largely on lifestyle magazines. Television's proliferation into the home in the post-war period was slow, therefore, it makes sense to consider its domestication from the resumption of the television service in 1946, when the numbers of sets in homes increased exponentially. I selected a sample of magazines based on the likelihood that they would have content about the arrival of television. I have looked at editions spanning from 1946 until 1976. The magazines I selected needed to have a home focus and be likely to care about the impact that television would have on the home. In general, magazines with a home focus overlap with the broader category of women's magazines, but to avoid confusion I will refer to the magazines as lifestyle magazines. In the magazines I looked for advice about which television set to purchase; how to display a television set in the home and in what conditions; advice about any issues that might arise from having a television; advertisements for television sets; adverts for products not related to television that featured television; and all other incidental appearances of televisions in the magazines.

*Good Housekeeping*, *Woman and Home*, *Homes and Gardens* and *Ideal Home* form the core body of my source material.<sup>44</sup> These are all ‘quality’ monthlies aimed at a female middle class audience, increasingly educated, with spending power. *Ideal Home* is arguably aimed at both a male and female readership and has a stronger design focus. Their limitations come from the narrow reach of their audiences (even though it is not possible to know for certain the demographics of a magazine’s eventual readership) and therefore the kinds of homes on display, and advice given, speaks to a specific, assumed readership. Ballaster et al. explain that ‘these magazines not only assume an exclusively heterosexual femininity, they also assume a shared set of cultural values – white, British, middle class – each articulated though notions of ideal femininity in similar but distinctive ways.’<sup>45</sup> They are referring to the presentation of femininity in the magazines, but ‘femininity’ can easily be substituted with ‘domesticity’ in the sentence to understand the ways that both categories were being constructed within a narrow set of expectations.

Women’s weekly magazines with a broad readership are also present in my sampling. These do not always have such a strong domestic focus but reached a wider audience than the monthlies. I have looked at *Woman*, *Woman’s Own* and *Home Notes*. *Woman* and *Woman’s Own* reached peak readership of 2.5 million in the 1950s, and both, under the direction of new editors, managed to reinvent the weekly women’s magazine from something ‘downtrodden’ or staid to something more exciting and appealing.<sup>46</sup> By 1964, women’s magazines of the ‘service’ weekly type were read by 60% of the upper and middle classes, 71% of the lower-middle classes and 63% of the working classes.<sup>47</sup> It is the weeklies, therefore, that were cutting across different class groups with a far-reaching appeal, which the domestic monthlies did not

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<sup>44</sup> I accessed all the lifestyle magazines at the British Library in London.

<sup>45</sup> Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron, *Women’s Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman’s Magazine* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 125.

<sup>46</sup> Cynthia L. White, *Women’s Magazines 1693-1968* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970), 128.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 169.

have. These kinds of magazines contain more anecdotal evidence of the impact of television on home life, including letters sent in by readers and opinion pieces by regular columnists.

I have also supplemented my sampling with DIY magazines *Practical Householder* and *Homemaker*, as they offer insight into the ways in which men were being encouraged to find a place in post-war domesticity through do-it-yourself improvements to the home. These magazines offered practical and cheap solutions to domesticating television; they reveal the contemporary trends for DIY furnishings around the television set.

The aforementioned CoID produced a monthly magazine called *Design*. I have looked to this publication for information about how television was conceptualised as a designed object or a piece of furniture. The Council was only established in 1944, so I looked at archive material from the Design Archive from then until 1976. *Design* featured many articles about the design of television receivers and provides evidence of the dominant narrative about television design from one of the key arbiters of taste in the post-war period. Alongside *Design*, I have accessed photographs, publications and brochures held at the Design Council archive, which pertain to television. This includes the CoID's 1957 exhibition on how to situate television in the home.

Alongside magazines, post-war exhibitions are another key source for the examination of how television was domesticated. The exhibitions I have researched include government-funded exhibitions, museum exhibitions and annual trade fairs. I focus on two crucial state-sponsored exhibitions: Britain Can Make It (1946) and the Festival of Britain (1951) which were important national events, linking design, technology and national progress. I have investigated how television appeared at these festivals through surviving catalogues, images and a selection of documents from the BBC written archives. Britain Can Make It, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1946 marked the beginning of a new focus on consumer culture, but in the

context of austerity. It is an example of Britain imagining its post-war future, through the lens of production and consumption. It was an example of an early post-war appearance of television, indicating that it was to be part of post-war reconstruction and a new vision of modern Britain. The Festival of Britain was another key event in Britain's post-war reconstruction. The main festival site was located at the Southbank in London, but there were other sites and events across the country. Becky Conekin describes its agenda:

The Festival of Britain set the broad parameters of a social democratic agenda for a new and modern Britain. The expertise of architects, industrial designers, scientists and town planners was enlisted in this government project to construct representations of the nation's past and future.<sup>48</sup>

Technology was central to this vision; television appeared across the festival, including in the Telekinema, a large format version of television, on a cinematic scale. Helen Wheatley has already identified that the Festival of Britain was a notable site of introduction to television, which made television into a spectacle.<sup>49</sup>

When investigating these post-war magazines and exhibitions, gender is a key consideration. The magazines, in particular, often fulfil a didactic function, educating women in housework, wifely duties and motherhood, while also bringing out social issues that concerned women, like their increasing role as worker, mother and homemaker. In this way, they took seriously some of the issues that might have been a concern for women and their domestic lives. Spigel argues that it is not easy to find evidence of women's home lives, or family life, but these kinds

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<sup>48</sup> Becky E. Conekin, *'The Autobiography of a Nation': The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>49</sup> Helen Wheatley, *Spectacular Television: Exploring Televisual Pleasure* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris).

of magazines were a space for women to think about these matters and find that they were taken seriously, through features such as letters pages and advice columns.<sup>50</sup> In her research into the domestication of television in the United States in the post-war period, a large amount of material is drawn from women's magazines. Spigel explains that, by looking at them 'as a viable source of historical evidence,' we are able to learn something 'about the way women might have experienced the arrival of television in their homes.'<sup>51</sup> It is through these magazines that women were given opportunities to negotiate the way in which the medium was integrated into their homes, mostly because 'they addressed female readers not simply as passive consumers of promotional rhetoric, but also as producers within the household.'<sup>52</sup> As with lifestyle magazines, the aforementioned Ideal Home Exhibition has also recognised the importance of the female consumer. Wheatley argues that the exhibition

was an important site for addressing the female consumer as key proponent of domestic modernity; the exhibition thus acted as a site which the 'housewife flâneuse' navigated partly in search of the objects and technologies needed to complete her 'ideal home.'<sup>53</sup>

Judy Giles has noted that the exhibition catered for the 'emerging lower middle class, those for whom home ownership was becoming a very real possibility.'<sup>54</sup> The Ideal Home Exhibition, alongside lifestyle magazines, are, therefore, essential sources for examining the intersectional relationship between domesticity, women, class, and consumer culture. While they do privilege a top down narrative in many ways – they are highly mediated sources, that provide a largely middle class understanding of domestic ideals – they can still be seen as representative of a

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<sup>50</sup> Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Wheatley, "Television in the Ideal Home," 207.

<sup>54</sup> Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 109.

side of television history that was, until more recently, ignored. That is to say that they reveal the role that women were asked to play in television's domestication, something that would not come to light were we to solely look at institutional or technical archives relating to television.

Constructions of domesticity are important; magazines and exhibitions provided powerful images of domestic life, which could create and destroy taste agendas. We shall see that the magazines and exhibitions eventually came to privilege the modern, suburban designed home, in line with the modernist rejection of the Victorian aesthetic. Penny Sparke explains:

The ideal of the modern, or as it was referred to at this time, the 'contemporary' home, was communicated widely through the mass media and, especially for new married couples who had not hitherto had the opportunity to own their home and consume on such a scale, it significantly displaced the traditional home as an aspiration.<sup>55</sup>

Magazines and exhibitions present us with an understanding of the construction of the home in this period; the idealised kind of home life and the problems that people, especially women, might face in achieving this. Ben Highmore has highlighted the importance of using representations of the ideal home in our exploration of domesticity. He writes:

It might seem that the idealised house is simply a fiction and that it is only the actual house that is real. But the idealised house not only shapes our imagination; it also shapes our real homes.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Sparke, *As Long as its Pink*, 101-2.

<sup>56</sup> Ben Highmore, *The Great Indoors: At Home in the Modern British House* (Profile Books: London 2014), 10.

Spigel presents further benefits of using mediated source material for understanding television's relationship with the home. She explains:

Clearly, the documents I use here – women's magazines, advertisements, television shows, films, books – do not reflect their society directly. I look at mass media as evidence not for what people do, think, or feel but for evidence of what they read, watch, and say. From this perspective, media products form an intertextual network – a set of related texts – through which people encounter statements about and images of their social world. These statements and images form a horizon of expectations about that world.<sup>57</sup>

In a similar fashion, I shall approach the magazines and exhibitions as evidence of how the ideal home was constructed. They act as sites where it is possible to find information on how television was framed as a consumer good and as a domestic object, aiding our understanding of how television's trajectory into a common household object was determined by these cultural forces and how they began to configure certain versions of television users.

Moving beyond idealised and mediated representations of television and its place in the home can be challenging, as evidence of the lived experience of television's place in the home is sparse or very difficult to track down.<sup>58</sup> MO, an anthropological project initialised in 1937 to document everyday life, is one source in which it is possible to find the voices of early television owners. MO was founded with the intention to 'collect a mass of data based on

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<sup>57</sup> Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and the Post-war Suburbs* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>58</sup> In the United States, Lynn Spigel has tried to overcome this by purchasing old photographs at junk sales and charity shops and has looked through them to find images of people and their television sets at home. Unfortunately, such an approach is dependent on having financial and temporal resources that were not available for this thesis.

practical observation, on the everyday life of all types of people.’<sup>59</sup> Uniquely, the project wanted to allow people ‘to speak for themselves,’ thus challenging standardised anthropological practices.<sup>60</sup> MO recruited volunteers to write diaries and respond to directives about everyday matters, including those concerning their homes. Two directives are of direct relevance to this thesis: the first was a directive issued in 1949 asking about television, the second was issued in 2003 and asked for respondent’s memories of television in the 1950s and 60s.

The responses are by no means broadly representative of Britain as a whole; there are only in the region of 700 responses to the 1949 directive and 100 for the later one. The data is dependent upon who decided to respond to the given directive and it is hard to ascertain the social make-up of the respondents. The directives function as another layer of discourse around television’s domestication, providing insight into how television was written about and remembered through a particular lens. They provide evidence of how the lived experience of owning a television was recorded, thus offering a crucial addition to the sources I have already discussed.

In February 1949, MO issued a directive asking respondents to state how they felt about having a television in their home; whether or not they live in the television area; whether they have seen a television set themselves; whether they have seen television transmitted, and finally, if they had a television set, how they thought it might affect their home pursuits. According to the MO report about the directive, they received 684 responses, from ‘a predominantly middle class group, generally above average intelligence and education.’<sup>61</sup> Although the respondents

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Ben Highmore, “Mass Observation: Two letters and ‘They Speak for Themselves’ [1936-7]” in Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 145.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> “M-O panel on television,” File Report (1949), 1. M-OA, University of Sussex. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Mass Observation Online,

cannot be seen to be representative of the general population at this time, they do provide a snapshot of the middle class hopes and anxieties about the medium. Only 2% of the respondents actually owned a television set and 74 lived in areas without television reception. However, more than half the respondents had seen television at least once and 37% reported never having seen it. As Helen Wood has stated, the directive is important because it predates ‘the widespread take-up of television, capturing a moment when many are just contemplating the *idea* of television as something they have glimpsed in others’ houses, at exhibition or in shop windows.’<sup>62</sup> The directive reveals the various reasons why these potential consumers were unsure about whether or not they wished to welcome the new medium into their homes. The responses do not give the impression of consumers excitedly anticipating the arrival of the new medium into the home, but instead many of the responses exhibit a certain degree of caution about television and the role it might play in their lives. Only 48% answer positively to the question of whether they would like a television set in their home, while 33% stated that they would not, with the remaining responses saying either that they would not purchase a set for the time being or they remained unsure about whether they would or not.<sup>63</sup>

The second MO directive was issued in 2003 and asked for respondents’ memories of television in the 1950s and 60s. This directive is revealing of how respondents remember how they, or their family, first acquired television. These responses provide, once again, a mixed set of memories about television, indicating that the acquisition of the first television set was not a straightforward process. Like the 1949 MO directive, the memories are filled with ambivalence towards television, alongside excitement, pride and enjoyment. The directive is only a small sampling from the specific pool of respondents who belonged to the MO project. Unlike the

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<http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/FileReport-3106> [Accessed July 03, 2017].

<sup>62</sup> Helen Wood, “Television – the Housewife’s Choice? The 1949 Mass Observation Television Directive, Reluctance and Revision,” *Media History* 21, no. 3 (March 2015): 342.

<sup>63</sup> “M-O panel on television,” 3.

1949 directive, which asked for respondents to imagine the future of television in their lives, the 2003 directive asked for memories. The responses, therefore, are necessarily seen through the lens of recall. The way in which someone remembers their early experiences of television will have been shaped by dominant narratives as well as personal histories, which must be taken into consideration in the analysis of the responses.

Through this polyhedron of source material it has been possible to detect glimpses of the ‘actual’ home, through respondent’s descriptions, personal photographs, letters sent into magazines, and features in magazines from ‘real’ homes. Partial evidence of ‘actual’ homes also appears through the kinds of debates and discourses that emerged, which were often the result of a belief that certain problems or challenges existed in the home in relation to television. This thesis is primarily concerned with how domestication was represented, in visual culture and a wide range of discourses, which, as I have shown, provides a rich, layered account of the ways in which a technology’s domestication is mediated. However, as I discussed at the beginning of the methodology, this can be seen to provide, as Pearson and Uricchio have discussed, a top-down narrative. To counteract this, I have looked for evidence of the ways in which, through the cracks of that narrative, evidence of lived experience sometimes appears, demonstrating *some* of the ways in which television users negotiated television into their lives. This then creates a more textured picture of why television’s domestication was represented and discussed the way it was.

## THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis will be divided into four chapters that explore different aspects of television’s domestication. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on how television’s domestication was pre-figured in its commodification, examining how television came to be positioned as a domestic consumer good. The final two chapters explore how television was integrated into constructions of the

home. Both these sections are preceded by a literature review, which acts as the first chapter of the thesis. This lays out the theoretical considerations for examining the domestication of television. It highlights the enduring relationship between television and home in academic literature, but points to an absence of attention towards the object form of the television set. I suggest that theories relating to object and media consumption can provide a useful framework for the thesis, but that this needs to be applied historically, in relation to histories of the British home.

Chapters 2 and 3 are concerned with the process of how the television set's domestication was pre-figured in its commodification, showing that, through the positioning of television as a domestic commodity, television in Britain became embedded in consumer culture. The pre-war stages of television – before notions about what it would become were fixed – form the central point of exploration in chapter 2. It reflects on the various ideas about the potential uses for television, situating this within the context of television's pre-histories in the 1920s, before the arrival of a regular broadcasting service, examining how these different versions of television were put on display at exhibitions and demonstrations. Television's articulation, in its early stages, was not in the home, but in spaces open to the public, like exhibitions and department stores. It was in these spaces, combined with efforts by manufacturers, that television was formulated into a consumer good and positioned as a domestic object-technology. In the first section, Chapter 3 looks in more depth at how television was positioned as a consumer good destined for the home, by examining how promotional material sold television to consumers, through advertisements, brochures and in shops. Television's promotion before 1939 is recognised as a forerunner to how television was marketed after the Second World War. In the second section, chapter 3 focuses on how television was understood as a consumer good by consumers, who had to be convinced that television held value as a commodity so that it was worth bringing it into their domestic lives. The two MO directives

provide evidence of how television was understood as a domestic commodity and the value that was put upon owning a television set.

Chapters 4 and 5 are concerned with the process of how television was ideally integrated into the British home after the resumption of the television service in 1946. Chapter 4 examines how the domestication of television re-shaped conceptions of how living space should be arranged. Magazines, design publications and exhibitions offered television owners models of how to successfully integrate television into the home. This was relational to the existing material culture of the home; chapter 4 considers how television's domestication was dependent upon other technologies and items of furniture. Using photographs and the MO directives, it will also consider to what extent we can uncover the lived experience of how television re-shaped living space and whether this is aligned with the mediated versions of how to ideally integrate television into the home. Chapter 5 considers how television featured more broadly in constructions of the ideal home from the post-war period until the mid-1970s in magazines, exhibitions and advertisements. It explores how television became associated with notions of comfort in the home, both in terms of achieving ideal comfortable viewing conditions and the use of television as a means to sell products associated with comfort. From this, is it possible to trace the ways in which a television lifestyle emerged, centred on comfort and supported by consumption practices. This is another way in which television's material form was inserted into consumer culture, beyond advertising on the medium itself.

Television's symptomatic and durable association with the British home is well-established, yet its physical articulation within domesticity has received less attention than other areas of enquiry. By asking how television was domesticated in Britain, from the 1930s until the 1970s, this thesis seeks to redress this imbalance. It aims to illuminate the multifaceted ways in which

television became embedded in consumer practices, constructions of the ideal home, and how its domestic situation was relational to the material culture of the home.

# CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW: OBJECTIFYING THE TELEVISION SET

## INTRODUCTION

The central question this thesis is asking is: how was television domesticated in Britain? The answer will require an interdisciplinary approach that combines research from across a variety of academic fields, including media studies, cultural history, social history, and sociology. The task of this literature review chapter is to synthesise a variety of approaches taken by academics working across these broad areas of study. It will do this by first considering how media scholars have previously thought about the relationship between television, home and everyday life. Though there has been important and pertinent research in this area, there are still a variety of unanswered questions. This literature review will show how an interdisciplinary approach can help to illuminate the relationship between television and home in Britain.

This literature review will explain how sociological work on the meaning and social life of objects allows us to appreciate television's materiality and to look more closely at its physical position within the home. Television's material presence in the home must not be viewed as static. Scholars like Arjun Appadurai and Daniel Miller affirm that objects should be seen as operating within a transactional economic system, through which they accrue meaning and move in and out of the commodity state.<sup>1</sup> In other words, objects should be examined within the context of consumption. I examine how media scholars Roger Silverstone, Eric Hirsch and David Morley have appropriated this sociological research into their own work on home media

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<sup>1</sup> Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

and its consumption.<sup>2</sup> In particular I am interested in how this can lend itself to examining the processes of domestication. The literature review will to argue that it is important to see this process historically, which is lacking in the more theoretical work of Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley. For this, it will be necessary to draw on work by cultural and social historians researching the British home across the twentieth century. Especially important will be work on the design of the British home and the integral nature of objects and consumption practices to the meaning of the home and the identity of the people living within it.<sup>3</sup> This also provides the context for television; we must seek to understand the space (both real and imagined) that the television entered into and became a central part of. By exploring domestication historically it is possible to understand the different agendas of producers and consumers, as well as cultural intermediaries such as magazines and exhibitions, in promoting or discouraging the introduction of a new object or technology in the home, in this case television. It is also possible to trace how, through this process, connotations of gender, taste and class became attached to the television. The intervention of this thesis will be to illuminate the social life of the television set; its impact on representations of the British home and its position as a doubly-articulated domestic object and cultural medium.

## TELEVISION AND THE HOME

Television's relationship to domesticity has been explored by scholars in a variety of ways, for there are multifaceted ways to consider the impact that television had on the home and vice versa. The physical object of the television set – how it developed into a domestic commodity and how it was ideally integrated into the material culture of the home – has received less

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Silverstone, Eric Hirsch and David Morley, "Information and Communication Technologies and the Moral Economy of the Household" in Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch (eds.) *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in the Domestic Space* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Judy Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home: Writings on Popular Design and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Penny Sparke, *As Long as its Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (Nova Scotia: NSCAD publishing, 2010 [1995]); Daniel Miller, "Appropriating the State on the Council Estate," *Man: New Series* 23, No.2 (June 1988): 353-372.

academic attention than other aspects of television's domestic articulation.<sup>4</sup> This section will examine the different ways scholars have engaged with television and the home, arguing that a more sustained engagement with television's physical articulation in the home and its relationality to its surroundings is needed.

Scholars have thought about the way that television changes our daily experience of the world, from within the confines of domesticity, re-shaping the boundaries between public and private. Raymond Williams identified the 'at once mobile and home-centred way of living' that a medium like television could facilitate, coining the phrase 'mobile privatisation' to describe this phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> Silverstone discusses this in terms of 'reach'; television extended the parameters of the home, allowing us to view far off events and places from the armchair.<sup>6</sup> Technology such as the telephone, the wireless, and eventually television, alongside the rise of the car and motorways, meant that the suburbs could expand, while still allowing for communication with the urban centres.<sup>7</sup> Both Spigel and Silverstone make the connection between television and the suburban sphere, arguing that the two reinforce one another. Silverstone goes so far as to say that television allows for the 'suburbanisation of the public sphere.'<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Spigel, in her work on the suburban home and media, has tried to show the ways in which the suburban sphere became a site of production in its own right, rather than an agent in the corrosion of the 'public' sphere.<sup>9</sup> David Morley explores how home media, like television, are able to connect the home into a national and global electronic community, that redefines our sense of nation:

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<sup>4</sup> Ondina Fachel Leal has conducted this kind of research for the television set in Brazil, see "Popular Taste and Erudite Repertoire: The Place and Space of Television in Brazil," *Cultural Studies* 4, no.1 (1990), 19-29.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003 [1974]), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, 28

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

<sup>9</sup> Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and the Post-war Suburbs* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 8.

National broadcasting can [...] create a sense of unity – and of corresponding boundaries around the nation; it can link the peripheral to the centre; turn previously exclusive social events into mass experiences; and, above all, it penetrates the domestic sphere, linking the national public into the private lives of its citizens.<sup>10</sup>

This echoes the oft-cited work of Benedict Anderson who claimed that media, including television, helped create an ‘imagined community’ in which people feel connected to one another.<sup>11</sup> Building on William’s early definition, Spigel has developed the concept of ‘privatised mobility’ to think about the ways in which media and domesticity interlink to allow us to travel, especially as media becomes more portable.<sup>12</sup> Deborah Chambers has formulated the concept of ‘media imaginaries’ to think about how our domestic lives are constructed by the media objects that we consume in our domestic lives. She argues that ‘the lived space of home is perceived and conceived through multiple competing and complementary media discourses.’<sup>13</sup> Material created in the ‘public’ realm is streamed into the ‘private’ realm of the domestic shaping the daily experience of inhabiting that space. Television redefined the figurative boundary between public and private, reshaping definitions of home and the experience of being ‘at home.’

The domestic sphere, by extension, shaped broadcast television content, as John Ellis contends: ‘broadcast television is a profoundly domestic phenomenon.’<sup>14</sup> Television has become

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<sup>10</sup> David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 107.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse*, 71.

<sup>13</sup> Deborah Chambers, *Changing Media, Homes and Households: Cultures, Technologies and Meanings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 13.

<sup>14</sup> John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema: Television: Video* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 13.

emblematic of, and instrumental in, the rhythms of everyday life in the home. Indeed, why it has become so important in our lives, Paddy Scannell argues, can be attributed to its ‘dailiness.’<sup>15</sup> Scheduling is a key factor in this, as television takes place ‘in time.’<sup>16</sup> The daily news at specific times, for example, or programming designed for the Christmas season, all provide a sense of temporality within the home. Janet Thumim explores how television programming was constructed around the ‘typical routine’ of the family:

There are assumptions about how people do, or should, spend their time, about domestic organisation and routines, and about the disposition of power both within the family, and between the family and the state.<sup>17</sup>

Further to this temporal dimension, it has been recognised that the everyday, busy nature of home life has shaped the content of broadcast television. Ellis has argued that broadcast television’s content is formulated to attract the distracted ‘glance’ of its domestic viewer, in contrast to the cinematic gaze.<sup>18</sup> This is achieved through the various ‘segments’ involved with broadcast ‘flow’ (as Williams first called it),<sup>19</sup> such as the distinctive music that begins the news, which help encourage the distracted viewer to return their glance to the television.<sup>20</sup>

Sociological and ethnographic studies conducted in the United States and Britain have explored how television audiences use the television in everyday life and how it affects social relationships, particularly within the family home.<sup>21</sup> Gauntlett and Hill argue that,

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<sup>15</sup> Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life: A Phenomenological Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 5.

<sup>16</sup> Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life*, 9-11.

<sup>17</sup> Janet Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture: Men, Women and the Box* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 19.

<sup>18</sup> Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 50.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, *Television*.

<sup>20</sup> Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 111-126.

<sup>21</sup> David Gauntlett and Annette Hill, *TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); Ann Gray, *Video Playtime: The Gendering of a Leisure Technology*

Before we can begin to understand the symbolic material and political structures in everyday life, it is important to consider what people have to say about their own experience of television and everyday life, and the practicalities of television in the domestic space.<sup>22</sup>

This kind of research has shown how television plays a different role in everyday life depending on gender and generation. Television does not have a uniform place within the home and everyday life, rather its role changes according to the person using or viewing the television. These studies are important because they remind us that television has social uses and that its reception in the home is far from passive. Television is not received submissively by its audiences, rather there is an active engagement over choice of programme, how television is used socially within the home and over the interpretation of text. This engagement, however, is often gendered; David Morley's research showed that the men in the study had more power over what was watched and that the women were often disempowered through TV viewing.<sup>23</sup> Men and women's leisure time is constructed differently within the home, which changes their relationship to television; this thesis will demonstrate the ways in which cultural intermediaries, such as lifestyle magazines, encouraged these gendered divisions in relation to television viewing.

Scholars have posited that women were an instrumental force in the early acceptance of television in both Britain and the United States. Programming was specifically designed for women, while women were appealed to as consumers to help encourage the take-up of the

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(London and New York: Routledge, 1992); James Lull, *Inside Family Viewing: Ethnographic Research on Television's Audiences* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); David Morley, *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (London: Comedia, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> Gauntlett and Hill, *TV Living*, 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> Morley, *Family Television*, 36.

medium.<sup>24</sup> Lynn Spigel's research into the domestication of television in the United States, in particular examining how women were appealed to in their capacity as housewives, has laid much of the foundations for thinking about the physical positioning of the television set within the domestic sphere.<sup>25</sup> Spigel demonstrates how the domestication of television was imbued with post-war constructions of class and gender, which manifested themselves in how householders were told to position their sets and how sets were advertised. As the introduction to this thesis discussed, in a British context, the importance of this kind of approach to television's early history has been recognised by Tim O'Sullivan, though his research is yet to meet the demands of the questions he has laid out.<sup>26</sup>

An examination of the set itself – its design and marketing – can also illuminate the relationship between television and the home. The design of the set is an important mediating interface between user and technology, which plays a role in how a medium is domesticated, as Andreas Fickers has discussed in relation to the material form of the radio, in particular its dials.<sup>27</sup> Yet, as Morley has recognised, the materiality of the television set has often been ignored, in favour of looking at television content.<sup>28</sup> Since Morley wrote this, there has been some research that has begun to examine the physicality of the television set and how it has been positioned as a consumer good. Deborah Chamber's short history of the material form of the television set

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<sup>24</sup> Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Post-war America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992); Janet Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture: Men, Women and the Box* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood, eds., *Television for Women: New Directions* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Spigel, *Make Room for TV*. For a Swedish perspective on television's domestication, see Tove Thursland, *Do You Have a TV?: Negotiating Swedish Public Service through 1950's Programming, "Americanization," and Domesticity* (PhD dissertation, Stockholm University, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> Tim O'Sullivan, "Television Memories and Cultures of Viewing, 1950-1965" in *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History*, ed. John Corner (London: BFI, 1991); "Researching the Viewing Culture: Television and the Home 1946-60" in *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*, ed. Helen Wheatley (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Andreas Fickers, "Visibly Audible: The Radio Dial as Mediating Interface" in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, eds. Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 411-439.

<sup>28</sup> David Morley "Television – not so much a Visual Medium, more a Visible Object" in *Visual Culture*, ed. C. Jenks (Routledge: London, 1995), 170-189.

considers the design of the set in Britain, arguing that it moved from an object associated with family leisure time to a symbol of movement and travel in its portable form.<sup>29</sup> Helen Wheatley has uncovered the place of the television at the mid-century exhibition, particularly focusing on how women were targeted at these spaces as television consumers and guardians of the ‘ideal’ home.<sup>30</sup>

While scholars have already considered the figurative way in which television altered the boundaries between public and private, how television content is shaped by its domestic consumption, and how television is used socially in the home, there has been less sustained research into how the television set was positioned as a domestic object and its physical place within the home. By building on Spigel’s research into the domestication of television in the United States, and the research already done into television’s material articulation by Chambers and Wheatley, this thesis will offer an account of how television’s relationship with home must be understood as physical. It is as much embedded in design, architectural and consumer practices, as it is in the institutions broadcasting content into the home.

## THEORISING DOMESTICATION

This thesis considers television’s physical place within the home, focusing on its duality as object and cultural medium in the domestic setting. In examining the television as object, this thesis builds upon the kinds of academic study that began in the late 1970s, largely in anthropology, into the social uses of objects. Cutting across economics and anthropology, scholars like Arjun Appadurai, Pierre Bourdieu, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, and Daniel Miller redefined how we understand the value of objects and their social and cultural

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<sup>29</sup> Deborah Chambers, “The Material Form of the Television Set: A Cultural History,” *Media History* 17, vol. 17 (August 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Helen Wheatley, “Television in the Ideal Home” in *Television for Women: New Directions*, eds. Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 205-222.

meanings.<sup>31</sup> Part of this involved neutralising the term consumption, to avoid misconceptions about it as a negative practice and better understand its complexities.<sup>32</sup> Miller writes that our understanding of material culture is ‘rudimentary’ and these kinds of studies are an attempt to rectify this.<sup>33</sup> Miller defines consumption ‘as a use of goods and services in which the object or activity becomes simultaneously a practice in the world and a form in which we construct our understanding of ourselves in the world.’<sup>34</sup> The connection between the use of objects and the construction of identity is very important. While consumption is not the explicit terminology used in all the studies, these academics are all concerned with how objects are exchanged and the various points at which objects gain value. They reject the Marxist position that objects gain value at the point of production, or that their value is determined only at the point of exchange. Indeed, Appadurai argues that objects move in and out of the commodity state and in order to understand their value and meaning we must follow the objects themselves, not simply see their meaning as derived from ‘human transactions, attributions, and motivations.’<sup>35</sup> He writes that ‘even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.’<sup>36</sup>

Thus, we should consider objects as having biographies in the same way that human beings do, and through this we can understand the ways in which different societies endow certain objects with certain meanings and use them in particular ways. As Igor Kopytoff suggests ‘a culturally

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<sup>31</sup> Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated from the French by Richard Nice (London and New York: Routledge, 2003[1983]); Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (London: Allen Lane, 1979); Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>32</sup> Douglas and Isherwood, *The World of Goods*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Miller ed., *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* (London: Routledge, 1995), 27.

<sup>35</sup> Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

informed economic biography of an object would look at it as a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories.’<sup>37</sup> In exploring an object’s biography we can learn about the object itself, the society it circulates within and about the kinds of tensions and complexities that lie within its usage, which will inevitably change over time and in different contexts. Again, as with people, an object’s drama lies in shifting identities: ‘an eventful biography of a thing becomes the story of the various singularizations of it, its classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context.’<sup>38</sup> The identity formation of the object and of the human subject inform and impact upon each other in a reciprocal fashion, making both equally important in the social and cultural construction of how we “identify”. From this perspective, looking at television as an object is a fruitful means to understand its cultural meaning and how these change over time, as well as how its usages become connected to versions of identity. As Appadurai suggests, however, the study of one object must constantly be considered with motion in mind. Miller warns: ‘culture [...] is always a process and is never reducible to either its object or subject form. For this reason, evaluation should be of dynamic relationships, never of mere things.’<sup>39</sup>

#### DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION

The positions of academics such as Miller, Appadurai and Douglas and Isherwood on the significance of objects and their uses provide a framework for thinking about the commodification of the television set, but this also needs to be considered within the context of domestic consumption. As Emma Casey and Lydia Martens remark ‘most consumption is essentially about domestic consumption [...] goods [...] are literally taken home after purchase

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<sup>37</sup> Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 68.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>39</sup> Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, 11.

for use, transformation and incorporation into domestic lives.’<sup>40</sup> The home is an idea, a social institution and material reality.<sup>41</sup> Consumption is one of the ways in which we can understand the home’s position as a social institution and how a household constructs its own ideas of itself. Put simply, the home is, to a large degree, created through consumption: ‘houses and apartments, whether owned or rented, are transformed into homes and made habitable largely via an appropriation and display of consumer goods.’<sup>42</sup>

Much of the academic work looking at domestic consumption has done so within the context of media and technology.<sup>43</sup> These academics explore how television and other media and technologies in the home enable the process of consumption and how they tie the household into wider economic and social systems beyond it. For example, Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley have tried in their work to provide theoretical accounts of how we might frame and analyse the relationship between the home, consumption and media.<sup>44</sup> Their contributions provide a framework for understanding households as economic units that can be defined in terms of how they consume media. This is not a passive process; household consumption involves economic transaction coloured by meaning. Every household consumes differently, but every household’s consumption is contingent on its economic and social position. This defines the boundaries around which an individual or household can consume. Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley define this as the ‘moral economy of the household.’<sup>45</sup> As already discussed, consumption is a social process, dependent on social values. Households make economic decisions based on their values, furthermore, value is attributed to a commodity not solely

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<sup>40</sup> Emma Casey and Lydia Marten, *Gender and Consumption: Domestic Cultures and the Commercialisation of Everyday Life* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007), 6.

<sup>41</sup> Tim Putnam and Charles Newton, *Household Choices* (London: Futures Publications, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> Stevi Jackson and Shaun Moores, eds., *The Politics of Domestic Consumption: Critical Readings*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 13.

<sup>43</sup> Berker et al., *Domestication of Media and Technology*; Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*; Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, “Information and Communication Technologies.”

<sup>44</sup> Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, “Information and Communication Technologies.”

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

grounded in its economic worth but also in its cultural or moral importance to the household or individual.<sup>46</sup> The household is not merely a passive unit consuming commodities, but an entity making continual judgements about how it consumes and how it appropriates the consumable items into their household. Douglas and Isherwood write that ‘goods assembled together in ownership make physical, visible statements about the hierarchy of values to which their chooser subscribes.’<sup>47</sup>

By looking at the ‘moral economy’ the status of objects is given due importance; it allows us to comprehend how their meanings change as they pass from being a commodity to an object within the home, in other words, how they are domesticated. It is through looking at consumption that it is possible to better understand domestication as a process and how it is connected into wider (economic and cultural) exchange systems. Domestication is dependent on an interaction between the meanings created in the public sphere and those created within the home. As Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley explain:

This engagement involves the appropriation of these commodities into domestic culture – they are domesticated – and through that appropriation they are incorporated and redefined in different terms, in accordance with the household’s own values and interests.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile Berker et al. explain domestication as

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<sup>46</sup> Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, 115.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas and Isherwood, *The World of Goods*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, “Information and Communication Technologies,” 16.

the process in which the household and its surroundings; the private and the public; and the moral and the formal or objective economy are related to each other, becoming mutually constitutive.<sup>49</sup>

Silverstone, Morley and Hirsch offer a structure through which to explore the domestication of home media from the perspective of consumption. They divide consumption into stages: these are appropriation, when and how the object is acquired; objectification, how the object, which has been bought, is then displayed; incorporation, how the object is used and regulated; and conversion, which is the point at which the meanings created within the household fuse with meanings outside, in other words how the symbolic display of the object is measured in terms of how it will be judged by the outside world.<sup>50</sup>

Both sections of the thesis must be considered alongside the cultural conditions of consumption that inform consumer choices. The manner in which the goods come into the home is heavily mediated, as Penny Sparke explains:

Given that the majority of the goods that we consume have been mass produced or “mediated” by the processes of industrial manufacture and commercial distribution, our private, interior spaces – and often our public spaces – are not only part of a spatial, material and visual reality but are also, perhaps more significantly, representations of idealized environments that are “mediated” through lifestyle and interior magazines, shop windows, exhibitions and voyeuristic television programmes.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Berker et al., *Domestication of Media and Technology*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, “Information and Communication Technologies,” 22-26.

<sup>51</sup> Penny Sparke, *As Long as its Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (Nova Scotia: NSCAD publishing, 2010 [1995]), X.

However, as Stuart Hall famously argued in relation to television texts, these messages are encoded at the point of production and then decoded by users.<sup>52</sup> Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch discuss how the approach to domestication that has been outline here facilitates a better understanding of the relationship between users and technologies, moving beyond the idea that meaning and use is only encoded by manufacturers and designers.<sup>53</sup> The study of domestication provides a means to excavate the reciprocal relationship between technology, space and users.

Furthermore, idealised versions of home life or home “lifestyle” change over time. It is important that the study of the home and its materiality is also historically contingent; the kinds of objects available for consumption changes according to market availability and demand, which is shaped by larger historical changes. The theoretical frameworks offered by Hirsch, Silverstone and Morley should, therefore, be applied historically, in order to understand the way that media consumption changes over time, in different conditions, and how this changes its relationship with the home.

#### CONSUMPTION, TASTE AND LIFESTYLE

The exploration of objects, consumption and the creation of meaning ties in with academic studies on taste and the ways in which display, and the use of objects can function as indicators of social position and markers of identity. Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological research in France has laid the groundwork for much of this research. This element of display is defined by Bourdieu in terms of distinction; people ‘distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classification is expressed or betrayed.’<sup>54</sup> Within the context of consumer culture,

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<sup>52</sup> Stuart Hall, “Encoding and Decoding in the TV Discourse” reprinted in *Culture, Media and Language*, eds. Stuart Hall et al (Hutchinson, 1981[1973]).

<sup>53</sup> Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch, eds., *How Users Matter: The Co-Construction of Users and Technologies* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>54</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 6.

this becomes increasingly complex as the goods on offer become increasingly diverse. One's 'lifestyle,' a concept which itself has been increasingly commodified across the twentieth century – described by Celia Lury as the 'definitive mode of consumption' – comes to stand in for an individual's individuality and identity.<sup>55</sup> Lifestyle 'groupings' emerge which people subscribe to, or attempt to subscribe to:

As a member of a particular lifestyle grouping, the individual actively uses consumer goods – clothes, the home, furnishings, interior décor, car, holidays, food and drink, as well as cultural goods, such as music, film and art – in ways which indicate the group's taste or sense or style.<sup>56</sup>

Bourdieu ascribes this to the 'new bourgeoisie' in particular, encapsulating how the ethics of production have been replaced by the aesthetics of consumption:

The new logic of the economy rejects the ascetic ethic of production and accumulation, based upon abstinence, sobriety, saving and calculation, in favour of a hedonistic morality of consumption, based on credit, spending and enjoyment. This economy demands a social world which judges people by their capacity for consumption, their 'standard of living,' their lifestyle, as much as by their capacity for production.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, consumption is a means for communicating social position and one of the defining tenets of modern society is that it is defined by consumption not production. This echoes historian Stephen Brooke, who queries whether we might be wise to examine 'whether particular class

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<sup>55</sup> Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 80.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 310.

identities have been, or can be, constructed from consumption as much as from production.’<sup>58</sup> The fact that identity was becoming increasingly connected to the home suggests that the home is an apt site from which to investigate how these social identities were constructed. From this premise it is possible to argue that examining how television is consumed will tell us something about how television as an object is valued and given a social ‘identity.’ It may also shed light on how the manner in which it is used by a person or household can inscribe that person or household with a particular social ‘identity,’ or even how someone or a household is invited to use the television in a specific way in order to identify with a particular social grouping. Previously, scholars have thought about how television functions as a mirror for consumer practices, offering a means of mediating consumer culture and offering versions of lifestyle for viewers to aspire to.<sup>59</sup> This thesis moves beyond just viewing television as a conduit for consumer culture, by considering how the set itself was embedded in consumer practices. The way in which the set was consumed, not just what was on television, could display a person’s or a household’s tastes and lifestyle choices.

The means through which people “know” what to consume is dictated by cultures of taste, that are constantly shifting and essentially socially defined. An object can be tasteful or tasteless and in its appropriation a person can become tasteful or tasteless: ‘Taste not only provides a means of defining why some goods are better than others but also a means of defining the people who use such definitions, and why they are better or worse than others.’<sup>60</sup> Taste is both inclusive and exclusive; it enables people to group together and also allows groups to distinguish themselves from other groups. Money is not always the means with which to acquire ‘taste,’ as Bourdieu explains, it is possible to have ‘economic capital’ but little ‘cultural

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<sup>58</sup> Stephen Brooke, “Class and Gender” in *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change*, eds. Francesca Carnevali and Julie-Marie Strange (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2007), 48.

<sup>59</sup> Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*; Rob Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture: Britain and the Transformation of Modernity* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris. 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Lury, *Consumer Culture*, 93.

capital' and vice versa.<sup>61</sup> Taste cultures are legitimised by powerful institutions, status groups, educational and cultural institutions and commercial institutions like the media.<sup>62</sup> Without sufficient knowledge, people are denied access to 'cultural capital,' which then excludes them from certain (often elite) areas of society. In this way, culture becomes a battleground for the struggle over social position.<sup>63</sup> Appadurai also argues this, writing:

The establishments that control fashion and good taste in the contemporary West are no less effective in limiting social mobility, marking social rank and discrimination, and placing consumers in a game whose ever-shifting rules are determined by "taste makers" and their affiliated experts who dwell at the top of society.<sup>64</sup>

Television is such a complex domestic technology because it is capable, through its institutional position, to create and reflect taste cultures, while, in its objective state, it is invested with its own cultural value, which can be reflected in the manner in which it is displayed and used within the home. We shall see in the following section how particular taste cultures, which developed in the post-war period in Britain, provide context for understanding the domestication of the television set.

## HISTORICISING TELEVISION AND HOME

The 'dynamic relationship' this thesis examines is the arrival of television into the British home, with a specific focus on how this process was mediated. Useful for this is an understanding of the context of the British home, including the kinds of debates, ideals and problems associated with the home, especially in the interwar and post-war decades. Much of this centres around the ways in which the British home was being modernised, or to borrow

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<sup>61</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

<sup>62</sup> Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997), 161.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 160.

<sup>64</sup> Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, 32.

Attfield's phrase, how modernity was 'brought home.'<sup>65</sup> Several academics, across a variety of fields, whose work I discuss below, have used source material including Mass Observation (MO) surveys, Council of Industrial Design (CoID) publications, home magazines and journals and their own interviews and surveys, to excavate the meanings of the 'modern' British home and how they have been constructed.<sup>66</sup> Comprehending how the home was constructed will aid an understanding of the ways in which television's domestic position was envisioned, and how the construction of home was then altered by television's arrival into it, in other words, its domestication. How was television's arrival perceived in terms of how it might impact on the imaginaries of home already circulating? Was it perceived as threatening, or positive, and how was its arrival to be managed?

Both the idea of home and the practical need for housing were important issues in the twentieth century in Britain. As Claire Langhamer suggests 'a focus upon the home, its significance, meanings and the lived experiences and relationships within it allows us to explore the tensions between the past, present and future within post-war Britain.'<sup>67</sup> She argues that there was an increased importance placed on the home in twentieth century Britain and this intensified after the Second World War. Langhamer posits that it was the defining feature of post-war reconstruction. This is illustrated by one response to a 1942 MO directive which asked "what does home mean to you?": the respondent wrote 'a happy home and family life is the bulwark of a Nation.'<sup>68</sup> Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd concur with this, arguing 'domesticity was to

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<sup>65</sup> Judy Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home: Writings on Popular Design and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*; Irene Cieraad, ed, *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999); David Jeremiah, *Architecture and Design for the Family in Britain, 1900-1970* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Claire Langhamer, "The Meanings of Home in Post-war Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2, (2005); Moira Munro and Ruth Madigan, "Privacy in the Private Sphere," *Housing Studies* 8, no. 1 (1993): 29-45; Putnam and Newton, *Household Choices*.

<sup>67</sup> Langhamer, "The Meanings of Home in Post-war Britain," 343.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 345.

be at the core of what a post-war world would be about.’<sup>69</sup> On account of this new focus on the domestic, Britain is described as becoming an increasingly privatised society, which turned inwards towards the family. Tim Putnam describes this change as being reflected in the way that houses were used: home life turned progressively towards the garden and away from the street.<sup>70</sup> Scholarship on the home largely shows that the privatisation of the home, and the influence of consumer culture on it, was happening before the arrival of the television and that the foundations for the ‘modern’ home were being laid in the interwar period.<sup>71</sup> Taking into account these historical accounts of the development of the British home is helpful, therefore, to contextualise the impact that television had on the home in this regard.

#### TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN IN THE ‘MODERN’ HOME

In order to understand the ways in which television’s relationship with the home was being constructed, it is necessary to be aware of the various other forces acting on the home in this period, especially other technologies and utilities. Two important forerunners to the television were telephone and radio, which were communication technologies that were also negotiated into the home. Keith Geddes has explored how radio and television were commodified through the manufacturing process, providing a survey of the key British manufacturing firms who helped to determine how sets were designed and how they were advertised.<sup>72</sup> Scholars have begun to look at how technologies were domesticated, recognising that this is part of the process for any technology’s success. Maggie Andrews has demonstrated how radio was domesticated in Britain, examining the reciprocal relationship between radio’s content/form

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<sup>69</sup> Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife*, (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 48.

<sup>70</sup> Tim Putnam, “‘Postmodern’ Home Life,” in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, ed. Irene Cieraad, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 147.

<sup>71</sup> Clive Edwards, *Twentieth Century Furniture: Materials, Manufacture and Markets* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Jeremiah, *Architecture and Design for the Family in Britain*; Langhamer, “The Meanings of Home in Post-war Britain.”

<sup>72</sup> Keith Geddes and Gordon Bussey, *The Setmakers: A History of the Radio and Television Industry* (London: BREMA, 1991).

and domesticity.<sup>73</sup> Before these electrical objects were invited into the home, electricity itself had to undergo a process of domestication, as Graeme Gooday has shown. Gooday emphasises the importance of the ways in which electricity was marketed as a clean, safe energy source and this marketing process was gendered.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, both Andrews and Gooday put prominence on the role of women in ensuring the success of the technology within a domestic setting and we shall see that this applies to television as well. The blueprint for the bourgeois comfortable home was laid out in the Victorian era, with the arrival of gas and electricity for the very wealthiest homes. These luxuries became more widespread in the interwar period, when the focus on the home was revitalised.

The design of the home was becoming increasingly integral to how the ‘modern’ home was constructed in the post-war period, as scholars Judy Attfield and Penny Sparke have shown across the breadth of their research. The idealisation of streamlined, modern-looking housing was not a neutral affair; how a home should look became a moral issue in Britain, as designers and architects began a crusade against ‘bad’ design. This paternalistic approach to design has similarities with the manner in which television was introduced; there was a concerted effort by the BBC to ensure that their public service remit would reflect the interest of the British public in terms of informing and educating them. Likewise, the CoID set up in 1944 had the purpose of bringing ‘good’ design to the masses. At its most optimistic, the movement hoped to have a levelling effect on society through the practices of ‘good’ design, which would be available to all.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Graeme Gooday, *Domesticating Electricity: Technology, Uncertainty and Gender 1880-1914* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008).

<sup>75</sup> Edwards, *Twentieth Century Furniture*, 188.

What emerged was a struggle between the designers' vision and the actual consumption or use of designed homes and objects. This was a struggle about class, as both Attfield and Miller have shown in their studies of new towns and council estates; residents used design to imprint their identity on their new homes actively resisting the vision of the architects and designers.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, once the austerity of the war years were over and people no longer had to buy the utility objects deemed 'good' design, generally people preferred to buy the 'bad' taste objects that were familiar to them.<sup>77</sup> Thus it is possible to argue that consumption became a battleground of interests in post-war Britain. A movement emerged, backed by government, in the shape of councils and exhibitions trying to shape consumption and use it as a means of betterment, while trying to curb the influence of commercial consumption. Yet, as Attfield argues, modernity was 'brought home' not by architects and designers but by the consumption choices made by people.<sup>78</sup> It is illustrative of the ways in which consumption can function as a potent force that is wielded by consumers not by the creators of goods.

Television's arrival into the home coincided with this drive to promote design in the home and the same outlets provided guidelines for the appropriate way to position and view the television.<sup>79</sup> This returns us to the framework offered by Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley of how objects and technologies are appropriated into the home. Theoretical work on consumption and the social uses of objects tells us that the use and display of objects in the home is always a negotiation between the forces of production, packaging, purchase and use. It would seem, however, that the post-war period in Britain is a particularly pertinent example of this because there was a clear, concerted effort to mould a specific taste aesthetic for the British home. There is an obvious class dimension, as the 'taste makers' came from the middle

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<sup>76</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*; Miller, "Appropriating the State on the Council Estate."

<sup>77</sup> Edwards, *Twentieth Century Furniture*, 183.

<sup>78</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*, 10.

<sup>79</sup> Jeremiah, *Architecture and Design for the Family in Britain*, 4.

classes, while the subjects of their efforts were the working classes. The class struggle emerged through the resistance to the didactic forces at work and is highly illustrative of the argument that design and taste are a powerful means for asserting identity.

It begs the question of where television, especially as it becomes an increasingly prevalent household item and leisure activity in the home, fitted into the vision of the ‘taste makers’ for the modern British home. Chambers has begun to ask these questions in relation to the design of the television set, but not enough research has been done into how this formed a dynamic relationship with the material culture of the home and ideas about its design and furnishings, which will be one of the aims of this thesis. Furthermore, building on Attfield and Miller’s research, this thesis will assess whether it is possible to identify examples of resistance to the mediated construction of television consumption, which might indicate that this was another site of tension in the drive to implement a ‘modern’ way of living.

#### DOMESTICITY AND GENDER

For the middle classes in the Victorian era the decoration and maintenance of the home took on a new importance and became a reflection of the whole household. This trend grew stronger across the early twentieth century, spreading across class groups as affluence became more widespread. The task of creating this ‘ideal’ home was designated to the figure of the housewife and she became tied to the domestic ideals of the British home.<sup>80</sup> The housewife was appealed to help modernise the home through the influence of scientific rationality, which was a cornerstone of modernist thought, through technology and labour saving devices.<sup>81</sup> The changing role of the housewife is much discussed in academic studies, especially in terms of

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<sup>80</sup> Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, *Home* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Jeremiah, *Architecture and Design for the Family in Britain*; Johnson and Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life*.

<sup>81</sup> Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, 96; Tony Bennett and Diane Watson, eds., *Understanding Everyday Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 12-14.

the home as a site of labour.<sup>82</sup> The fact that home, for women, was, and continues to be, predominantly a site of labour has been used by academics as one of the main distinctions used to show why the home can mean differently for men and women. The role that television would come to play in the home – as an object of leisure – is defined by the gendered relations of time and power within domesticity.

Class is a further dimension; the changing nature of work in the home for middle class women is also frequently discussed. In the Victorian era traditionally middle class women had servants, however from the turn of the twentieth century household servants started to decline, coinciding with the rise of ‘labour saving devices’ designed to lessen a woman’s load. Middle class women, therefore, had to take on the role of the servants, or manage the house with day help, and their work load became more similar to that of working class women.<sup>83</sup> The labour saving devices, it is argued, did not ease the work load, rather the new standards of cleanliness, and the idea that time freed up can be used for other household or family tasks, meant, according to Ruth Schwartz Cowan, ‘more work for mother.’<sup>84</sup> This work on the housewife figure and the idea of the home as a site of work is reflected in work on the social uses of television. Morley’s study in 1986, for example, found that women did not feel they could spend time watching television as a sole activity because there was always something else that could be done simultaneously. Thus, the legacy of ‘a woman’s work is never done’ is reflected in the use of the television decades later.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*; Blunt and Dowling, *Home*; Sue Bowden and Avner Offer, “The Technological Revolution That Never Was: Gender, Class and the Diffusion of Household Appliances in Interwar England” in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, eds. Victoria De Grazia and Ellen Furlough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Casey and Marten, *Gender and Consumption*; Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Johnson and Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life*; Langhamer, “The Meanings of Home in Post-war Britain”; Sparke, *As Long as it’s Pink*.

<sup>83</sup> Bowden and Offer, “The Technological Revolution That Never Was,” 268.

<sup>84</sup> Ruth Schwartz Cohen, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>85</sup> Morley, *Family Television*, 140.

As well as being a labourer within the home, the housewife is also portrayed as being the chief consumer. She is in charge of the goods that enter the home, how they are used and displayed. This could range from the food that is bought, cooked and eaten to the furnishings of the home. Women are traditionally presented as being innately better at decorating the home and, as several academics have argued, have gained consumer power by being the targeted audience for most household products being added to the market.<sup>86</sup> Rather than being a passive consumer, duped by advertisements, research seeks to show that women were often savvy shoppers, navigating a complex matrix of goods, budgeting accordingly and choosing what to display in the home to present a specific homely ambience.<sup>87</sup> Lynn Spigel's work on the arrival of United States television into American homes shows how the early advertisements for television sets appealed to women in this way, while magazines provided advice for women on how to resist the easy appeal of television and not let it distract from other household tasks.<sup>88</sup> Women's role, as a consumer, made her an important target for those marketing television, while the mediating forces concerned with a woman's place in the home, such as magazines, sought to warn and advise women about the disrupting force that this new commodity might have.

Technologies, especially those for the home, were actively being gendered in order to appeal to women, who were being constructed as the main consumer within the home. The home was experienced differently for men and women, and this was, to some extent, dependent on the ways that expectations about their experience of home were being mediated through available goods and materials like magazines and advertisements. When researching the domestication

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<sup>86</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*; Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*; Sparke, *As Long as it's Pink*.

<sup>87</sup> Angela Partington, "The Designer Housewife in the 1950s," in *The View from the Interior: Women and Design*, revised edition, eds. Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (London: The Women's Press, 1995).

<sup>88</sup> Spigel, *Make Room for TV*.

of any technology, gender has to be a key consideration because both the ways in which a household is encouraged to adopt a new technology and the ways that technology is used once it arrives in the home were coloured by gender.

## CONCLUSION

Television's relationship with the home has been explored in a variety of ways, but a history of British television is yet to fully account for the importance of television as an object and its place within the material culture of the home. This thesis, therefore, aims to provide a cultural historical account of the television set as a domestic object, focusing on its relationship to the home. I have argued that one way in which to consider the material history of television and the home is to build on the theoretical work on consumption, which has been happening across media studies and sociology, and to apply this in a historical way. In this way, this thesis will utilise an interdisciplinary approach that draws on research from across media studies, design history and British socio-cultural history. This cross-disciplinary framework allows us to consider how the television set was domesticated, the process that shaped the trajectory of television's relationship with the home.

This literature review has shown that this process has to be considered within the wider context of the changes taking place in how domesticity was constructed in the decades following the Second World War. Domestic consumption in Britain in the post-war period was not a neutral issue; as research by Attfield and Miller has shown, consumption practices were being mediated with specific social agendas, in particular the drive for promoting 'good' design. From the 1940s onwards, it was increasingly common that how and what people consumed acted as a marker of social position and an expression of identity. The fact that such a 'decisive cultural technology,'<sup>89</sup> entered the home within the context of a powerful drive by taste makers

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<sup>89</sup> O'Sullivan, "Television Memories and Cultures of Viewing, 1950-1965," 159.

to bring 'good' taste to the masses suggests that researching television's negotiation into the home as furniture and medium will tell us something about the role of media in the building of the modern British home. Further to this, it will also reveal how television became emblematic of, and instrumental in, the creation and perpetuation of certain constructions about taste, class and gender, which were mediated through the kinds of source material I will be using, such as lifestyle magazines, promotional material, exhibitions, trade fairs, and output from institutions like the CoID.

## CHAPTER 2. INTRODUCING THE TELEVISION SET

### INTRODUCTION

Television both streams content into the home and lives physically within it, but before television entered into home, there was neither a concrete idea of what television as a medium, nor as an object, was. In its rudimentary stages in the 1920s, ‘television’ was only a description of what the invention could do – see things that were far away. As the technology became more advanced, the physical apparatus of television was divided between transmitting equipment (cameras and transmitters) and receivers (television sets), thus widening the definition of what television could encompass. These allowed for television content to be captured and received. Television, therefore, developed into a medium that was dependent upon specific technological apparatuses, of which the television set was one. The idea of the television set emerged before a concrete idea of television as a medium had developed, thus it is important to view the history of television as a series of interactions between technology and cultural form.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, these interactions were taking place across a transnational stage, as Knut Hickethier states ‘television was not the invention of one single nation but the result of international activity.’<sup>2</sup>

For the purposes of answering how television was domesticated in Britain, this chapter is concerned with how television developed from an invention into a medium and object-technology that was destined to be primarily consumed within the home. As with other inventions and technologies which have found their way into the home, television’s domestication was informed by how it was commodified, which was a mediated process,

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<sup>1</sup> This approach is advocated by Raymond Williams in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003 [1974]).

<sup>2</sup> Knut Hickethier, “Early TV: Imagining and Realizing Television” in *A European Television History*, eds. Jonathan Bignell and Andreas Fickers (London: Blackwell, 2008), 55-78. See also, Anne- Katrin Weber, *Television before TV: A Transnational History of an Experimental Medium on Display, 1928-1939* (PhD dissertation, Université de Lausanne, 2016).

shaped by a variety of social factors, interested parties, and consumers.<sup>3</sup> As Roger Silverstone and Leslie Haddon have posited ‘the link between design and domestication is provided by commodification, the process through which objects and technologies emerge in a public space of exchange values and in a market-place of competing images and functional claims and counterclaims.’<sup>4</sup>

This chapter will consider how television’s domestication was pre-figured in the ways it was commodified. It will examine this by tracing television’s development from an invention into a consumer good destined for the home. It will look at the multiple ways in which television was first positioned, before being largely understood as a domestic object-technology. This early positioning took place at exhibitions and demonstrations, where television was viewed in large crowds. It was in these kinds of spaces that certain members of the public were introduced to the *idea* of television. At demonstrations and exhibitions, television was presented ‘as one of those modern marvels, wonders of technology, alongside the automobile and the aeroplane.’<sup>5</sup> Television’s arrival in the 1920s was not so much the beginning of something new, but the culmination of technological and scientific advances that had been happening for the last hundred years. Television, therefore, when it was introduced, was the latest in a long line of ‘modern wonders’ that might have been encountered at exhibitions or read about in print

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<sup>3</sup> Examples include: for electricity, see Graeme Gooday, *Domesticating Electricity: Technology, Uncertainty and Gender 1880-1914* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008); for the gramophone, see Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006); for radio, see Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012) and Shaun Moores, “The Box on the Dresser: Memories of Early Radio and Everyday Life,” *Media, Culture and Society* 10, no.1 (January 1988); for television in the United States, see Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Post-war America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Leslie Haddon and Roger Silverstone, “Design and the Domestication of Information and Communication Technologies: Technical Change and Everyday Life” in *Communication by Design: The Politics of Information and Communication Technologies*, eds. Robin Mansell and Roger Silverstone (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 45.

<sup>5</sup> John Hartley, *The Uses of Television* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 77.

media.<sup>6</sup> Histories of early television have tended to focus on the BBC and the television service,<sup>7</sup> which only reveal a partial account of television's development in the 1920s and 30s. The notable exception to this is Keith Geddes' history of the radio and television industry in Britain.<sup>8</sup> This chapter will seek to re-dress this imbalance by emphasising the importance of manufacturers and exhibitors in the development of television in these early decades, not only in developing the technology beyond the experimental stage, but in bringing television to the attention of potential television consumers, despite reluctance and hostility from the BBC towards the medium.<sup>9</sup> It will do this by examining how television was presented in the interwar and post-war period, building on the research of John Hartley and Helen Wheatley, who have both asserted that early television in Britain must be understood within the context of public exhibition and spectacle.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter aims to bring together this research, building a more cohesive narrative for television's development into a domestic commodity in spaces open to the public, such as exhibitions, from the mid-1920s up until the early 1950s. It is apparent that television's early development was geographically specific; the exhibitions explored all take place in London and it is only in 1949 that the television service extended beyond the London area. Thus the

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<sup>6</sup> Bernhard Rieger has listed other 'modern wonders' from the nineteenth century onwards as including 'industrial machinery, railways, aeroplanes, airships, film, photography, electricity, motor cars, the gramophone, the radio,' in Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1980-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>7</sup> See Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol. 2* and Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Keith Geddes and Gordon Bussey, *The Setmakers: A History of the Radio and Television Industry* (London: BREMA, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Sonja De Leuw's article "Transnationality in Dutch (Pre) Television: the Central Role of Erik de Vries," in *Transnational Television History: A Comparative Approach*, eds. Andreas Fickers and Catherine Johnson (London and New York: Routledge, 2012) has also argued that histories of television should look beyond broadcasting to understand the ways in which individuals, institutions, and companies other than broadcasters, played a role in shaping the future of television and bringing it to the public's attention.

<sup>10</sup> Helen Wheatley, *Spectacular Television: Exploring Televisual Pleasure* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris) and Helen Wheatley, "Television in the Ideal Home" in *Television for Women: New Directions*, eds. Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 205-222; Hartley, *Uses of Television*.

understanding of what television would become was formed in a specifically urban, metropolitan setting, which acts in opposition to its later image as a medium of the suburbs.<sup>11</sup> We shall see that, in the process of its negotiation, television was at first imagined in a variety of different ways, as ideas about the potential uses of the technology were explored. Television, for example, was not always conceived of as solely being a domestic medium; in its early stages, there were visions of large audiences viewing television on large screens, akin to the cinematic experience. As John Hartley has stated, we should recognise ‘that the fledgling medium was embarked on a career of historical development which had no foregone conclusion, no obvious direction, no preordained form.’<sup>12</sup> It will become apparent that the transition from invention to commodity was not linear; both before and after the war, television was positioned in multiple, and co-existing, ways as technology, medium, and commodity. Rather than understanding television’s pre-war history as an epilogue to its post-war development,<sup>13</sup> this chapter aims to highlight the continuities between the two time periods, arguing that, while television became part of the home *en masse* in the 1950s, it grew into a domestic object in the 1930s, as technology and medium conjoined.<sup>14</sup> This will lay the foundations for understanding the television set’s domestication from the 1950s onwards, which the rest of the thesis will go onto explore.

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<sup>11</sup> For explorations of television and the suburbs, see Roger Silverstone, ed., *Visions of Suburbia* (London: Routledge, 1997) and for United States context, Spigel, *Make Room for TV* and *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and the Post-war Suburbs* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Hartley, *Uses of Television*, 78.

<sup>13</sup> Television history books have a tendency to do this, see Hilmes, *The Television History Book*, Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom vol.2*, Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note here that there was a market for television sets beyond the home, in pubs, schools and other quasi-public spaces, see Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

## METHODOLOGY

The focus of this chapter will be on the spaces in which people were introduced to television, ranging from the first demonstrations in 1925 to the Festival of Britain in 1951. After the early 1950s, television had become a largely familiar medium and, especially by the lead up to the Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953, was a widely owned household object, thus its introductory phase had largely come to a close by the early years of the 1950s. The main exhibitions that I will discuss are annual trade fairs, Radiolympia and the *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Show, the exhibition 'Television' at the Science Museum in 1937, 'Britain Can Make It' at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1946, and the 'Festival of Britain' at London's Southbank in 1951. Surviving material from each of these exhibitions is varied and I will draw on a variety of archive material pertaining to them, including brochures, photographs, print material, committee meeting notes and correspondence. The magazine *Practical and Amateur Wireless*, a publication aimed at an 'expert user', has proved to be an informative source for demonstrations; it included listings and reports from demonstrations in the pre-war period, as well as reports from Radiolympia and other exhibitions.

This chapter grew out of a three-month placement with the National Science and Media Museum, where I worked with their C.O. Stanley/Pye archive and the *Daily Herald* image library. Material in both archives convinced me to begin the thesis in the interwar period, as I found a wealth of material relating to television in this time frame. The majority of primary research for this chapter dates from 1936, however, the narrative begins in 1925, with Baird's early demonstrations, therefore, due to time restraints, I am mostly reliant on the research of other scholars for this early period. The second of volume of Asa Brigg's history of British broadcasting has proved to be an immensely useful source, for which I draw the majority of information for the analysis pre-1936. Photographs from the *Daily Herald* image archive held by the National Science and Media Museum have proved to be invaluable, as there are several

images of televisions on display at the pre-war Radiolympia exhibitions, with information printed about the images on the reverse of the photographs.

## TELEVISION AS ‘MODERN WONDER’ IN THE 1920S



Figure 2.1: John Logie Baird's early television model on display at the Science Museum in the 1920s, *Daily Herald* collection, National Science and Media Museum

One of the first ways television might have been encountered in Britain was at one of John Logie Baird's television demonstrations, which took place from his studio in Soho and at the London department store Selfridges & Co. in the latter half of the 1920s. In 1925, Selfridges, on London's Oxford Street, was one of the first places it was possible to view television. Joe Moran describes this early experience of television:

At first, television asked a large imaginative leap of its viewers. Baird demonstrated his machine to small crowds, who looked through a cardboard viewfinder [...] The four-by-two-inch screen displayed a quivering silhouette of simple shapes.<sup>15</sup>

Baird had spent much of the 1920s experimenting with television in his attic in Hastings, cultivating the image of the lone genius inventor, before he bought his ‘televisor’ to London. Asa Briggs describes what a visitor to Hastings would have encountered:

An old tea chest formed a base to carry the motor which rotated a circular cardboard disc. The disc was cut of an old hat box, and a darning needle served as a spindle. An empty biscuit box housed the projection lamp. The necessary bull’s eyes lenses were bought from a bicycle shop at a cost of four pence each. With such crude apparatus, held together with glue, sealing wax, and string, Baird achieved exciting results.<sup>16</sup>

Radio, before television, had undergone this phase of invention; the early stage of radio’s development is often referred to as its ‘gadgeteer’ stage. The early adopters of radio were mostly technologically-minded men, who made their own receiving equipment. As Scannell and Cardiff describe:

The receiving equipment looked more like something out of contemporary science fiction than a simple household object. No attempt was made to box in and conceal the technical component of the receiver which looked like what it was, a weird and wonderful scientific gadget [...]

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<sup>15</sup> Joe Moran, *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History of Britain in Front of the TV* (London: Profile Books, 2013), 16.

<sup>16</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol. 2*, 519-20

Many people first heard the wild waves calling through the earphones of a crystal set. This crude listening device needed no electricity to power it, was simple to construct and cheap in comparison with valve sets [...] it was impossible to amplify the sound of the signal, hence listening in on headphones was as solitary an activity as the stereo Walkman is today.<sup>17</sup>

Television, however, soon developed from strange invention into spectacle. Historians of television differ in their beliefs about Baird's role as the 'inventor of television,' but Briggs accounts him with one important achievement: 'he publicized television more effectively than any other individual.'<sup>18</sup> This was aided by the investment of Gordon Selfridge Junior, owner of Selfridges & Co, who gave Baird financial backing and put television on display in his store.<sup>19</sup> Advertisements for the display cited television as 'something that should rank with the greatest inventions of the century.'<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in his column in *The Times*, Selfridge presented television as the next in line of recent modern technical marvels; he wrote 'this picturesque apparatus with its cardboard and its bicycle chain is in direct succession to Bleriot's gallant monoplane and Shackleton's brave boat.'<sup>21</sup> While the technology was in its rudimentary stages, visitors were asked to consider it within the context of other – but by then familiar – inventions. Television was put on display at Selfridge & Co's sixteenth birthday celebrations, where one million people walked through the doors, suggesting that this was one of the earliest examples where television was encountered *en masse*.<sup>22</sup> Television was only one of several attractions, providing one of many spectacles at the exhibition. Leaflets offered to customers about television again emphasised television's connection to another older invention. They read:

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<sup>17</sup> Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting: Volume One 1922-1939 Serving the Nation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 356-7.

<sup>18</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol. 2*, 523

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 525.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, 524.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Moran, *Armchair Nation*, 14

<sup>22</sup> Moran, *Armchair Nation*, 15.

The picture is flickering and defective, and at present only simple pictures can be sent successfully; but Edison's first phonograph rendered that "Mary had a little lamb" in a way that only hearers who were "in the secret" could understand and yet, from that first result has developed the gramophone of today.<sup>23</sup>

Writing about the development of Edison's phonograph, Lisa Gitelman has argued that new media is necessarily considered alongside the media technologies that have come before it. She writes: 'to the inventor and his contemporaries, the phonograph meant what it did because of the ways it might resemble and—particularly—because of the ways it might be distinguished from existing machines.'<sup>24</sup> In the case of the publicity of television at Selfridges & Co, visitors were being asked to use the case of older technologies to aid their imaginations in seeing the potential in television, even though it remained in its crude early stages. This confirms Hartley's assertion that early spectators of television were viewing it within the context of 'crowds, spectacle, urban activity, technology and modernization.'<sup>25</sup> Television was presented as a spectacle at Selfridges, not as a commodity (the first Baird 'televisor' only went on sale in 1926),<sup>26</sup> but its display in a department store foreshadowed its later positioning as a consumer good.

Between its positioning as spectacle and consumer good, imaginings about what television was and what it might achieve were varied; without a fixed television service in place, there was no stable notion of what it would be. Jamie Medhurst has explored how these imaginings manifested themselves in contemporary popular culture, including novel *Television Girl* from

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Hartley, *Use of Television*, 75.

<sup>26</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol. 2*, 527.

1928, which imagined television as a something akin to a telephone with pictures, while in other sources it appeared as a spying device.<sup>27</sup> In 1928, the magazine *Television* was launched, billed as the ‘world’s first television journal,’ it included instructions on how to build a simple ‘televisor,’ meaning that the mechanically minded amateur could start to build their own equipment.<sup>28</sup> Like radio before it, television entered into a ‘gadgeteer phase’ where enthusiasts constructed their own sets and receiving equipment, before it was understood as a consumer good. Gordon Bussey describes how ‘for all its shortcomings, thirty-line television held great fascination for the enthusiast [...] half his pleasure came from building the Televisor and getting it to work, and pride in having done so enhanced his enjoyment of the result.’<sup>29</sup>

The display of television at Selfridges in 1925 was one of the first instances of a large crowd witnessing television. Throughout the rest of the 1920s, Baird continued with his demonstrations to smaller, more select groups. In 1926, he demonstrated a ‘noctovisor,’ which used infrared rays to transmit images from a darkened room. In September 1927 he demonstrated television to a British Association meeting in Leeds and in 1928, at Glasgow University.<sup>30</sup> In 1928, television appeared at Radiolympia, where it was once again displayed to a large audience.

Advertisements for Baird’s television demonstration at Radiolympia were placed in the *Times*, which announced that the Baird Television Development Company intended to broadcast its own programmes shortly. The Baird ‘dual set’ was featured in the advertisements, which stated that: ‘orders for the new dual sets will be taken at the exhibition and as soon as possible afterwards our special broadcasting series from 133 Long Acre will commence.’<sup>31</sup> This

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<sup>27</sup> Jamie Medhurst, “The Early Years of Television and the BBC,” lecture given at the University of Nottingham, 14 December 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Anon, “How to Make a Simple Televisor,” *Television* (March 1928), 29.

<sup>29</sup> Bussey, *The Setmakers*, 221.

<sup>30</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol. 2*, 528.

<sup>31</sup> Baird Television Development Co., advertisement, *The Times* (4 August 1928).

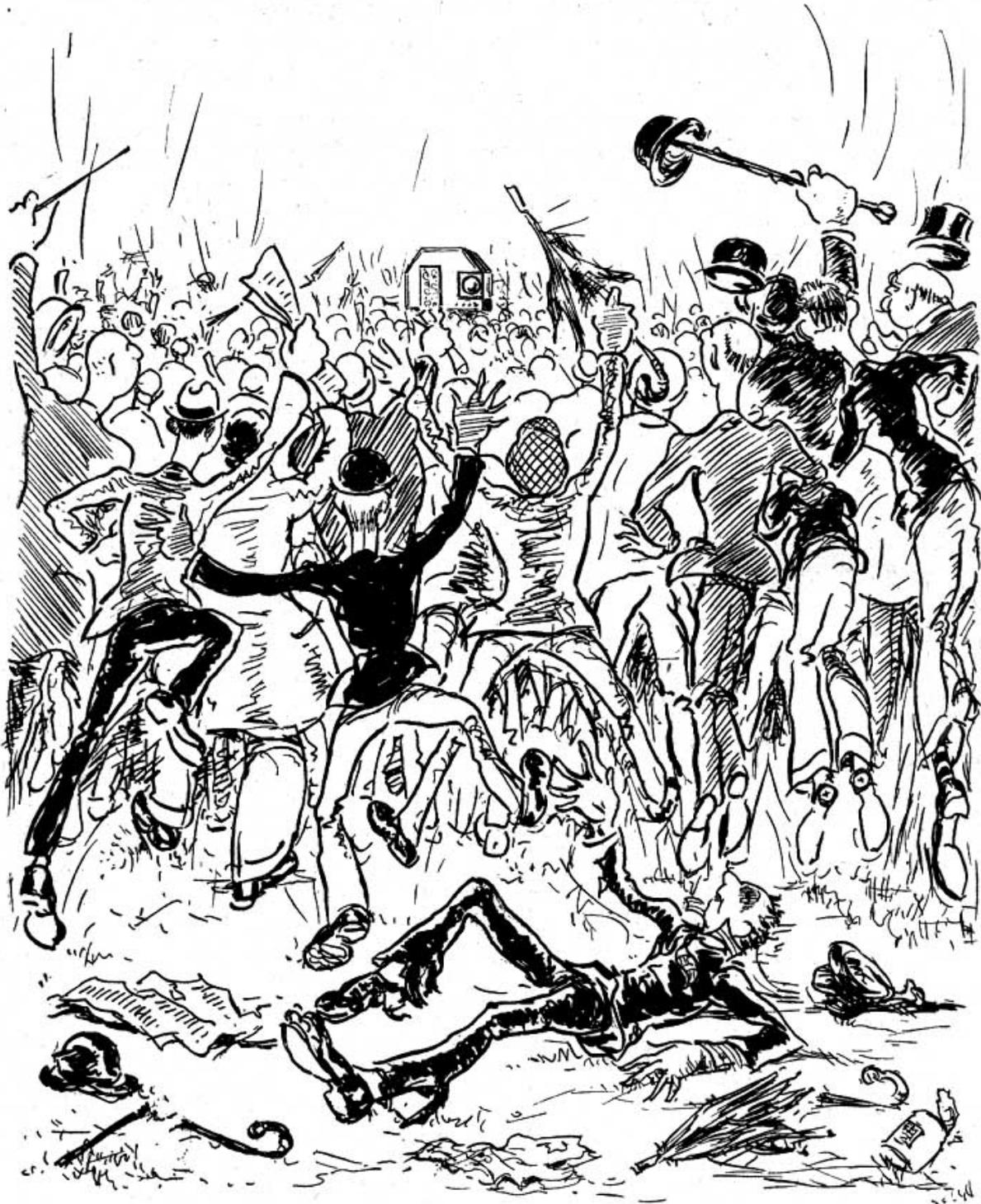
suggests that the company believed that potential consumers needed assurance that a television service was imminent in order to consider the expense of buying a set. While still exploiting the potential of spectacle as a means to introduce the potential consumers to television, the Baird company were also trying to form the television receivers into a consumer good, not merely a spectacle. In 1928, advertisements for Baird television sets appeared in *The Times* and *The Daily Chronicle*, with the themes of ‘television for all’ and ‘television in the home,’ again trying to convince potential consumers that television was viable as a consumer good for the home.<sup>32</sup> However, estimates made by Baird in 1929 about how many sets were in use show that these efforts were not successful: he estimated that, including home-made sets made by amateurs, only 29 sets were able to receive broadcasts.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*. Vol. 2, 533.

<sup>33</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*. Vol. 2, 547-8.

OLYMPIA — 1928



Injured one: "I WILL see that Televisor, even if they kill me."

Figure 2.2: Cartoon from *Television* magazine, September 1928

A cartoon from *Television* magazine in 1928, depicting a frenzied crowd at annual television exhibition Radiolympia scrambling to see the ‘televisor,’ suggests that there was public excitement about the new medium (see Figure 2.2). The caption reads ‘I WILL see that Televisor, even if they kill me.’<sup>34</sup> The crowds, according to this cartoon, were desperate to witness the spectacle of television, but this enthusiasm was not translating into television sales. On the cover of the same edition of *Television* magazine a well-dressed couple are shown watching a television screen, which is depicted merging with an image of a theatrical scene, where a crowd watch a production on stage. The implication is that the live theatre act was being brought directly into the home of the couple, merging the boundaries between the public spectacle of the theatre and a more private experience of it mediated by the television screen. It shows that in 1928, despite the low television sales, television was understood as a potentially domestic medium, which could bring traditionally communal entertainment, such as the theatre, into the home. However, at this stage in television’s history, this was merely an imagining of television’s future, as so few sets were owned and there was no regular television service. The reality was that television was itself ‘on stage’ in this period, more likely to be seen by a large crowd than in the intimate setting of the home as depicted on the cover of *Television*. As we shall see, television, in order to develop beyond the imaginaries of its potential uses, required a more concrete understanding of how it would function as a medium, not just as a technology.

## THE MEDIUM NEEDS A MESSAGE

In his research on technology and the culture of modernity, Bernhard Rieger defines a specific branch of ‘modern wonders’ as ‘representational technologies,’ for which he gives the examples of the tabloid press, film, gramophone and radio, and in which television could easily be the next example.<sup>35</sup> These are, in another word, media. According to Rieger,

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<sup>34</sup> “I will see that televisor,” cartoon, *Television* (September 1928), 29.

<sup>35</sup> Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*, 3.

‘representational technologies’ presented their own set of complexities because they involved the ‘task of determining what kinds of knowledge these novel technologies generated,’ which made them particularly difficult to locate ‘within existing hierarchies of knowledge production.’<sup>36</sup> Television was no different and the early decades of its development were marked by a struggle between manufacturers and the existing modes of ‘knowledge production,’ namely broadcasting, to define what the new medium would look like – both its cultural and physical form – and how it would be consumed. The complexity of television’s ‘double articulation’ – its position as a technological object and a communicative medium – is revealed in the early struggle between the manufacturer Baird, on the one hand, and the broadcaster, the BBC, on the other. This is why, as Andreas Fickers has already contended, it is worth taking a more systematic approach to media history, as it allows us to make these connections between the material, institutional and symbolic.<sup>37</sup> In examining the material history of the television set, the struggle to develop the form of television is of interest because it marks the moment at which technology and medium coalesced to form a more concrete idea of what television would be.

As we have seen, by the end of the 1920s, television was a concept that certain members of society would have been aware of through exposure in newspapers, magazines, at department stores, and at exhibitions. However, as Baird’s company realised, without anything to broadcast building a market for their receivers was almost impossible, and without this kind of commercial interest and money, the survival of television could have been at risk. On this basis, it was the manufacturers of television who pushed for television’s development into a broadcast

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Andreas Fickers, “The Birth of Eurovision: Transnational television as a challenge for Europe and contemporary media historiography” in *Transnational Television History: A Comparative Approach*, eds. Andreas Fickers and Catherine Johnson (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 15.

medium.<sup>38</sup> The BBC, as the broadcasters of radio, were the logical choice to take on the task of building a television service, but they were infamously reluctant to do so. Despite demonstrations of Baird's equipment, the BBC remained concerned that the technology was not in an advanced enough state and therefore it would be irresponsible to transmit a service to the public.<sup>39</sup> As Briggs sums up:

Baird and his backers felt [...] that they could not hope to sell British 'televisors' until they had more regular broadcasts at more convenient times: the BBC did not feel that it could embark on a vast and unknown expenditure, particularly when there was fundamental doubt about the future of the system.<sup>40</sup>

In November 1928, the Baird Television Development Limited formally asked the Postmaster General for a license to operate its own broadcasting station,<sup>41</sup> which had it been agreed to, could have changed the entire direction of broadcasting history in Britain.

After much negotiation with the BBC and the Post Office, from the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1929, Baird was given the use of a BBC transmitter for an experimental television service. Baird was offered 5 hours a week transmission time, with broadcasts in the mornings of weekdays between 11 and 11.30am.<sup>42</sup> As quoted above, these 30-line experimental broadcasts were estimated to have been received by less than 30 receivers. Reports by viewers suggest that the quality was poor, especially in the first year of transmissions, when sound and vision had to be alternated in two minute sequences. One viewer described that 'the general effect is similar to

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<sup>38</sup> The role of manufacturers in television's development continued into the 1950s. The head of Pye Ltd, C.O. Stanley, played a key role in lobbying for commercial television, which he believed was necessary in order to sell more receivers.

<sup>39</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol. 2*, 525.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 557

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 538

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 546.

that of looking into an automatic picture-machine as installed in amusement halls.’<sup>43</sup> Synchronisation was achieved in March 1930, which had been necessary to promote the sale of sets, though sales continued to be extremely poor.<sup>44</sup>

In 1930, the first television play was broadcast, Pindarello’s ‘The Man with a Flower In His Mouth.’ Baird’s 30-line equipment was unable to transmit more than the head and shoulder of one actor at a time, so the production value would not have been very advanced. Television historians believe this would have been a poor quality broadcast, but the audience were impressed nonetheless, as David Hendy describes:

Despite everything, the audience was gripped - not so much by what they’d seen “with their physical eyes” as by what they’d seen with their minds’-eyes. It was a prophetic vision of something astounding just round the corner.<sup>45</sup>

According to Briggs, the press also gave the broadcast a favourable reception, again despite the reservations held by the BBC about the quality of transmission.<sup>46</sup> The experimental television service was beginning to construct an idea of what the future of television programming might look like, with technological form and programming content starting to merge into a more coherent idea of what the medium might do. Another example of the blueprint of the television service taking shape was the commencement of outside broadcasts in 1931. In June 1931, Baird televised the Derby horse race, of which a journalist from the *Daily Herald* wrote ‘the results astonished us all. We had found the stepping stone to a new era in which mechanical eyes will see for us great events as they happen and convey them to

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, 548.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>45</sup> David Hendy, “Invention part I” on BBC website’s *Birth of TV* project, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/birth-of-tv/invention-1> (accessed 25/04/17).

<sup>46</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol. 2*, 551.

us at our homes.’<sup>47</sup> As the form of the experimental service began to evolve, it became easier to conceptualise what the service could offer in the way of home entertainment.

Despite these advances, the experimental service was axed in 1933 and once again the future of the television service was thrown into limbo.<sup>48</sup> Television sales still remained low at this point, indicating that the experimental service had not achieved much in this regard. Baird told the Postmaster General in 1931 that less than a thousand sets had been sold, although estimated that about ten times that number had been built by amateurs, indicating that television’s gadgeteer phase was still in existence at this time.<sup>49</sup>

By the 1930s, a competitor to Baird’s system of television had emerged. EMI, conjoined with Marconi, had developed an electrical scanning system, using Cathode Ray Tube technology. The technical co-operation between these two large firms and the laboratory equipment available to them meant that their system far outstripped Baird’s mechanical scanning system.<sup>50</sup> When the regular television service was eventually launched in November 1936, both systems were trialled, but it was only a matter of months before Baird’s mechanical system was rejected in favour of the EMI electronic system. While technological superiority had to win out in the end, the Baird company’s commitment to television and persistence in the face of the BBC’s hostility, show that it was the vision of the manufacturers that propelled the technology forward, finding a way to develop the representational technology into a fully-fledged medium, which had a purpose beyond a ‘wonder’ of the modern age.

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<sup>47</sup> *The Daily Herald*, June 4, 1931, quoted in Briggs, *History of Broadcasting vol. 2*, 552.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 566.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 554.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 568.

## EXHIBITING TELEVISION POST-1936

The launch of the regular BBC television service did not provide the tonic to television sales that the Baird company had hoped for, though sales did increase significantly from the small number that had been sold before 1936. Briggs writes:

Even with the Coronation, the beginning of a monthly sports review, tennis at Wimbledon, the Lord Mayor's Show, the ceremony at the Cenotaph on Armistice Day, Mr Middleton with his 'television garden,' and Pet's Corner at the Zoo, sales of television sets increased only slowly. About 400 had been sold by the end of January 1937: at the end of the year the figure was estimated at just over 2,000.<sup>51</sup>

With only a couple of thousand receivers installed in people's homes, exhibitions and demonstrations, therefore, remained as the spaces in which people were most likely to come into contact with television. As Hartley has argued:

The difference between these spectacular one-offs and the BBC's first regular television was not only that the latter was a continuing service, but also, interestingly, that far more people would have seen the exhibition version of television than ever watched the early regular broadcast.<sup>52</sup>

Hartley argues that the metropolitan, urban audience that travelled to exhibitions, where they would have encountered television for the first time as a wonderful spectacle, were influenced by the 'mid-century passion for spectacular national self-aggrandizement, for the politics of mass-mankind and for the public display of industrial innovation as the aesthetic of the age.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 611.

<sup>52</sup> Hartley, *Uses of Television*, 74.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 75.

This, he argues, marks out television's early history as decidedly different to what it grew into in the post-war period:

But the form in which television was to become familiar, that of a commercial leisure entertainment medium for individuals living private lives in family homes in suburbia, did not grow out of the earliest versions of the new medium; not even the 'regular' service launched by the BBC in November 1936.<sup>54</sup>

Hartley goes on to argue that television's *form* grew from the influence of broadcasting in the United States, and it was the American vision of television broadcasting as a domesticated family based form of entertainment, which shaped British television into a domesticated medium.<sup>55</sup> So while Hartley has recognised the importance of the public sphere for understanding the early manifestation of television in Britain, he views it as a discreet episode in television history, which has little bearing on television's subsequent development in the post-war period. Indeed this view is often compounded in studies of television history, which frequently centre around the 1950s, and when pre-war television is considered, it is often presented as a prologue to a more central story.<sup>56</sup>

Helen Wheatley's research into television's place at the mid-century exhibition has begun to draw connections between how television was exhibited pre and post-war, challenging this bipartite view of television's history in Britain. Wheatley has argued that television's introduction should be understood as 'spectacular' and that the mid-century exhibition is an important, yet overlooked, site for understanding the history of television.<sup>57</sup> Elsewhere in an

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>56</sup> See Hilmes, *The Television History Book*; Janet Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture: Men, Women and the Box* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Rob Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture: Britain and the Transformation of Modernity* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris. 2007).

<sup>57</sup> Wheatley, *Spectacular Television*.

article on television in the ideal home, Wheatley has shown that the public dimension of television's early consumption is key to understanding its success, as this was where potential consumers, in particular female consumers, were shown the physical place that television might take in their homes.<sup>58</sup> Television, from the interwar period onwards, became part of the imaginary of what the modern home looked like and the role that consumer technologies played within this.

After the initial demonstrations of television as a scientific marvel in the 1920s and television's early appearance at Radiolympia in 1928, television became a more commonplace fixture at exhibitions, trade fairs, and other public spaces after 1936. Anne-Katrin Weber has explored this as a transnational phenomenon, with television sets going on display at world fairs and exhibitions across Europe and the United States of American in the interwar period.<sup>59</sup> In Britain, a significant change after 1936 was that many more manufacturers had released television receivers onto the market, meaning that the Baird model was no longer the only option to buy. At the 1938 Radiolympia, sixteen firms displayed receivers and the prices of sets had been sharply reduced.<sup>60</sup> The *Radio Times* special edition for the coming of television contained three advertisements for television receivers from G.E.C., His Master's Voice and Ecko-Scophony.<sup>61</sup> As competition emerged between manufacturers, television receivers became increasingly commodified, and sets were distinguished by their superior electronics as well as their attractive designs, which shall be explored in more detail in the following chapter. As we shall see, however, in this early period of television's development, the scientific nature of television and its status as a 'modern wonder,' in many cases, remained part of the way in which television was framed and discussed. After the Second World War, this became a means

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<sup>58</sup> Wheatley, "Television in the Ideal Home."

<sup>59</sup> Weber, *Television before TV*.

<sup>60</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol. 2*, 620.

<sup>61</sup> "The television number," special edition of the *Radio Times* (October 23, 1936).

of framing television as a national achievement, as television found its way into the narrative of reconstructing Britain at festivals and exhibitions.

#### TELEVISION AS ‘TECHNICAL ACHIEVEMENT’ AT THE SCIENCE MUSEUM

A key moment for introducing television was the Science Museum’s 1937 exhibition ‘Television,’ at which visitors were presented with the scientific aspect of television. As Wheatley has argued for exhibitions in general, the ‘television’ exhibition at the Science Museum is another overlooked site in television’s early history; Briggs and Wheatley both make passing references to it, but there is little detail as to how television was presented to visitors to the exhibition.<sup>62</sup> It is estimated that the exhibition received one quarter of a million visitors and that 10,000 exhibition handbooks were sold, making it an important site of introduction to the television.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, several respondents to the 1949 Mass Observation directive on television remember encountering television for the first time at the Science Museum. This exhibition celebrated television as a technical achievement, continuing the idea of television as a ‘modern wonder,’ which we shall see differs from other contemporaneous exhibitions displaying television. The introduction to the exhibition catalogue writes that ‘there can be no doubt that high definition television is one of the most remarkable technical achievements of our times.’<sup>64</sup>

The exhibition handbook provides a clear account of what the exhibition aimed to communicate to visitors about television. The handbook introduction stated:

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<sup>62</sup> Wheatley, *Spectacular Television*, 24; Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*. Vol. 2, 612.

<sup>63</sup> Science Museum, *Annual Report* (1937), 11. Science Museum documentation centre, London. ED 79/178.

<sup>64</sup> E.E.B. Mackintosh, “Introduction” in the ‘Television’ exhibition handbook, ed. G.R.M. Garratt (1937), 7. Science Museum documentation centre, London. ED 79/178.

A Television Exhibition has therefore been organised by the Science Museum, in conjunction with the British Broadcasting Corporation and the leading manufacturers, in order to provide the public with an opportunity to appraise the value of this new form of entertainment. It is hoped that the exhibits will help to explain the problems involved and the methods of their solution, and will give some indication of the research and ingenuity which have gone to make this new development possible.<sup>65</sup>

The exhibition was addressing visitors to the exhibition from a pedagogical vantage point; it intended to educate them about the development of, and science behind, the new medium. Other attempts had been made to educate people about television. In 1930, the principles of television were demonstrated at the Exhibition of Visual and Auditory Aids in Learning at the LSE, organised by the Adult Education Society. Other demonstrations were provided for schoolchildren, members clubs, the press and teachers associations, to name but a few.<sup>66</sup> The Science Museum installed a working television set in their basement in 1936 for visitors to experience demonstrations of television, which *Practical and Amateur Wireless* reported 2,000 people saw in the first two days, and in the same year John Logie Baird presented the museum with his first receiver.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Demonstrations were listed in weekly magazine *Practical and Amateur Wireless*, which frequently showed photographs from these demonstrations.

<sup>67</sup> Anon, "Television Notes," *Practical and Amateur Wireless* (October 31, 1936), 166.

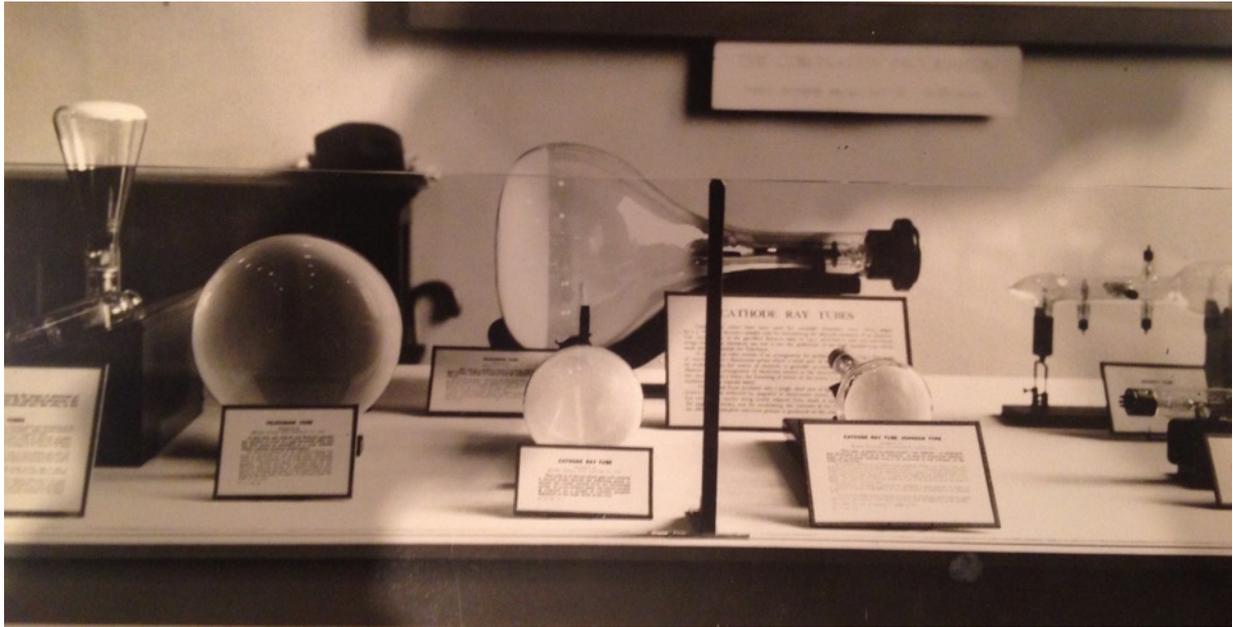


Figure 2.3: Photograph showing display cabinet from 'Television' exhibition at Science Museum, 1937, *Daily Herald* collection, National Science and Media Museum

Images from the 'Television' exhibition at the Science Museum show that the exhibition format was fairly traditional (see Figure 2.3). Using scientific objects, displayed in glass cabinets, the exhibition led visitors from the early advances in 'seeing by electricity,' through Baird's mechanical scanning techniques, up until the modern day techniques involving cathode ray tubes and electrical scanning.<sup>68</sup> A model of the transmission tower at Alexandra Palace was on display, celebrating the BBC's contribution to television's development.<sup>69</sup> Paraphernalia relating to the cultural significance of television was represented in an image on the wall of a television camera filming the coronation of George VI in 1937, which had been partly televised.<sup>70</sup> This narrative historicised the progress of television, depicting television as something that had emerged from decades of scientific progress. The spectacle at the exhibition was the technical aspects of television, rather than the content that the BBC television service

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<sup>68</sup> Photograph, Science Museum 'Television' Exhibition (1937). Science Museum documentation centre, London. B370316

<sup>69</sup> Photograph, Science Museum 'Television' Exhibition (1937). Science Museum documentation centre, London. B370315.

<sup>70</sup> Photograph, Science Museum 'Television' Exhibition (1937). Science Museum documentation centre, London. B370315.

could transmit. As Hartley has highlighted, this experience of television was quite different from the experience of witnessing television in a domestic setting. He writes:

For those who first watched it, television was something out-of-the-ordinary in the most literal sense, and it required the mobilization of the resources of modern life even to get to it. People would have to leave home, catch a train, bus or tram to get to a huge venue – a stadium, exhibition hall or purpose-built park – in or near a giant metropolis, in which thousands of other similar but unknown people would be congregating.<sup>71</sup>

Thus it was in the context of a large, urban museum that many visitors would have experienced television for the first time, with television framed within the context of the history of scientific achievement, which the Museum as a whole represented. This view is compounded by the fact that television was also on show in the spaces connected to the mobilised, metropolitan modern lifestyle Hartley describes: in 1936, rail passengers were offered the chance to look-in at television in the waiting room of Waterloo station (see Figure 2.4).<sup>72</sup> Television was thus presented as a curiosity, situated in the context of a public, urban environment, providing commuters with entertainment as they waited to travel. Television has frequently been viewed in the context of Raymond Williams' concept of 'mobile privatisation,' the idea that media such as television allows one to travel without leaving the private sphere of the home,<sup>73</sup> however, this demonstration shows that, if only for a fleeting moment, television was experienced *within* mobile, public space, by commuters, rather than private citizens. It is only by considering the multiple spaces and situations that television occupied in the 1930s that we

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<sup>71</sup> Hartley, *Uses of Television*, 76.

<sup>72</sup> "Television at Waterloo Station," Photograph, *Daily Herald* (August 26, 1936). *Daily Herald* collection, National Science and Media Museum, Bradford.

<sup>73</sup> Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003 [1974]).

can understand the numerous ways that it was possible to engage with the new medium, as its identity as technology and cultural form continued to take shape.



Figure 2.4: Television viewing at Waterloo station in 1936, *Daily Herald* collection, National Science and Media Museum.

These small scale demonstrations happened sporadically in the late 1930s, so the demonstration booths included in the Science Museum ‘Television’ exhibition would have been viewed by more people and provided a wider array of receivers to view on. The receivers used at the exhibition were on sale at the time, and were provided so that the visitors could experience viewing television, either watching live broadcasts when they were available or pre-recorded test films. The organising committee, however, wanted to avoid any sense that these receivers were being advertised for sale. Notes from a committee meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 1937 reveal that, in order to avoid an appearance of commercialism, it was resolved that no conspicuous label should be exhibited on each receiver, but that a general label to the effect that ‘receivers have been provided by the following firms’ should be exhibited at the entrance to the

demonstrations.<sup>74</sup> Despite the best efforts of the exhibition committee to avoid the appearance of commercialism, there were still complaints following the exhibition. A member of GEC, who stated that they were writing in a personal capacity, was critical of the commercial aspects of the exhibition, writing that it undermined the educational aspects of the exhibition and that ‘there are other and more proper places where such contests are fought out!’<sup>75</sup> Colonel Ernest Mackintosh, who was then director of the Science Museum, replied to this letter saying that he felt the same apprehensions. This exchange is indicative of the concerns about television and its connections to consumer culture and the resistance shown towards this by institutions such as the Science Museum.

Even though the exhibition was a collaboration with television manufacturers and one of the aims was to ‘foster an appreciation of television as a home entertainment,’ there was a reticence about the fact that this was dependent upon the commercial sale of television receivers. By focusing on television’s technical achievements, it hoped to avoid the intrinsic connection between the growth of television as a home entertainment and commercialism. The reply from the GEC member mentions that there are ‘more proper places’ for this, which may indeed refer to spaces such as the Ideal Home Exhibition or a department store such as Selfridges, suggesting that the technical achievement of television should be kept separate from the commercial need to sell sets. These kinds of anxieties about commercialism reappeared in debates about commercial television, in which commercial television was seen to infect the more noble intentions of public service broadcasting associated with the BBC.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Meeting Notes, Television Exhibition Committee Meeting (January 8, 1937). Science Museum documentation centre, London. ED 79/178.

<sup>75</sup> Letter from G.E.C. member to E.E.B. Mackintosh (July 14, 1937). Science Museum documentation centre, London. ED 79/178.

<sup>76</sup> Jonathan Bignell, *An Introduction to Television Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004), 52.

Meeting notes and letters from the Science Museum documentation centre also reveal the exasperation felt by the manufacturers towards the Science Museum in relation to the ‘Television’ exhibition. Scophony, for example, wanted to exhibit a 2-foot receiver, which was not yet on the market. The Science Museum did not want, however, to mislead visitors in any way, so refused to place the receiver alongside the other commercial receivers on display.<sup>77</sup> Once the exhibition was on show, manufacturers felt that the demonstrations of their receivers were unsatisfactory. Baird Ltd wrote to the Science Museum to complain about the quality of the demonstration films shown on the receivers:

On Tuesday afternoon, for example, a South African aeroplane travel film was featured and not only was the print far too dense to be handled by the Cossor scanner, but the subject matter was dull and uninteresting. While I was watching, a large section of the audience simply walked away in disgust [...]

Surely the films exhibited should be of the right type, as the whole idea of the Organising Committee was to show Television as something really entertaining – otherwise the visitors will be given an entirely wrong outlook concerning the service if they base their conclusions on a visit to the Science Museum.<sup>78</sup>

Likewise, Cossor Ltd (who provided the transmitter for the demonstration films) wrote complaining about the demonstration films, stating that ‘as things are at present I think more harm is being done than good’ and that ‘the generally poor impression reflects back on the transmitter.’<sup>79</sup> Problems with the transmissions at the exhibition were also reported in *Practical and Amateur Wireless*, which stated that ‘local interference from diathermy apparatus’ had

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<sup>77</sup> Meeting Notes, Television Exhibition Committee Meeting (January 8, 1937). Science Museum documentation centre, London. ED 79/178.

<sup>78</sup> H.J. Barton Chapple to G.R.M. Garratt, Letter (July 22, 1937). Science Museum documentation centre, London. ED 79/178.

<sup>79</sup> Cossor Ltd to G.R.M. Garratt, Letter (July 26, 1937). Science Museum documentation centre, London. ED 79/178.

meant that the transmission was not ‘at its best.’<sup>80</sup> These complaints show a disjuncture between the aims of the Science Museum to educate visitors and the manufacturers’ aim to entice visitors into becoming potential consumers of their products. For these manufacturers, the spectacle of television on offer at the exhibition had fallen short of expectation, which is perhaps why ‘more appropriate spaces’ such as trade fairs offered them a more suitable location to exhibit their wares.

More than this, however, it illuminates the symbiotic relationship between television as technology and what is able to show, again highlighting the complexities involved in introducing and forming ‘representational technologies.’ It reveals the lack of investment in television from the BBC; were the BBC showing more hours of television, at a higher quality, then the demonstration films would have been less necessary. Without quantity or quality of television service, the task of the manufacturers to sell sets was made more difficult, which was an argument that Baird, and other manufacturers, such as Pye Ltd, continued to make into the 1950s. According to Briggs, the press also began to adopt this attitude and the *Daily Express* reported in 1937:

Manufacturers [are] making magnificent gestures by dropping the price of television receivers and increasing their efficiency. But do the BBC reciprocate by increasing their television service? There is no definite news. They may do this and that. Gentlemen – we need action. And quickly. Because the present programme allowance – two hours daily and a demonstration film in the morning – is woefully, ridiculously inadequate.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Anon, “Television Exhibition,” *Practical and Amateur Wireless* (June 26, 1937), 356.

<sup>81</sup> *Daily Express* (September 6, 1937) quoted in Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*. Vol. 2, 612.

The beginning of a regular television service, therefore, did not end the frustrations of the manufacturers and the press with the BBC. With so few hours of actual television being broadcast, and with sets still being relatively expensive, sales remained sluggish.<sup>82</sup> The television service became caught in an impasse; the Postmaster General would not release more money to the BBC for television, because ‘given the small number of owners of television sets, there was surely no justification for financing television,’<sup>83</sup> and without more investment in the television service, manufacturers could not sell more sets. This continues to support the contention that the public sphere remained an important space in which to introduce television to consumers, to encourage them to consider bringing the fledgling medium into their homes.

#### CONSUMING TELEVISION AT RADIOLYMPIA AND THE IDEAL HOME EXHIBITION

At annual trade fairs such as Radiolympia (1926-65) and the *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition (1908-) the blueprint for the future of television consumption was laid down. For manufacturers, trade fairs provided an ideal platform to promote their products, as these were established spaces for the dissemination of consumption practices, particularly for the home. By way of association, television’s appearance at these two exhibitions marked it out as a technology destined for home consumption. Radiolympia was an exhibition dedicated to the already-domesticated radio, so television’s appearance in this context situated it as another domestic medium. The Ideal Home Exhibition was specifically centred around the home, which again would have shaped how visitors considered television in that context.

Television made its first appearance at the Ideal Home Exhibition in the form of an advert for Baird as early as 1930 and, as we have already seen, television was first demonstrated at Radiolympia in 1928. A photograph from Radiolympia in 1937 shows that a cornucopia of radio and television sets were on display, offering the visitor with an array of choice (see Figure

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<sup>82</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*. Vol. 2, 612.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 614.

2.5).<sup>84</sup> While the trade fair as a whole had fewer visitors than the year before, the television section was reportedly always busy.<sup>85</sup> At the 1938 Ideal Home Exhibition, visitors were presented with the ‘Televviewer’s parade,’ where all the latest models were on display, again presenting the television receivers as commodities for the visitor to peruse.<sup>86</sup> This is quite different to the Science Museum’s approach to the receivers on show at the ‘Television’ exhibition, where five receivers was considered sufficient to demonstrate the technology. According to Briggs, at the 1938 Radiolympia, ‘television was the main feature of the show’ with sixteen firms displaying receivers, at sharply reduced prices.<sup>87</sup> John Law, in his history of the year 1938, cites the 1938 Radiolympia as a turning point in television’s development, as it marked the beginning ‘of a genuine competitive market for television receivers, where both technical enthusiasts and early adopters bought sets.’<sup>88</sup> This view was first expressed in *Radio Pictorial*, which states that ‘when the history of television comes to be written it is certain that [this exhibition] will have to be written boldly as the days that mark a turning point for this new art.’<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> “Radiolympia opens,” photograph, *Daily Herald* (August 25, 1937). *Daily Herald* collection, National Science and Media Museum, Bradford.

<sup>85</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol. 2*, 612.

<sup>86</sup> “Televviewer’s parade,” *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (1938), 252. *Daily Mail* Ideal Home collection, V&A Art and Design archive, London. AAD/1990/9.

<sup>87</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol. 2*, 619.

<sup>88</sup> Michael John Law, *1938: Modern Britain, Social Change and Visions of the Future* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 60.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Law, *1938*, 60.



Figure 2.5: Photograph of stands at Radiolympia, 1937, *Daily Herald* collection, National Science and Media Museum

As Helen Wheatley has argued, at trade fairs like Radiolympia and the *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Show, consumers were presented with an imaginary of the role that television might take in their homes; television was ‘imagined as the pinnacle of domestic modernity.’<sup>90</sup> In this way, these sites acted as the space in which the television came to be understood as a domestic leisure technology, not a public spectacle akin to cinema. These trade fairs helped to educate consumers about the role that television might play in their homes, not so much as a scientific device, but as a leisure accessory to their everyday lives. Television, despite alignments to older forms of media such as the radio and gramophone, was hailed as a something novel and exciting in the 1930s, whose visual nature offered up new possibilities for home entertainment. In relation to the Ideal Home Exhibition, Wheatley observes that:

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<sup>90</sup> Wheatley, “Television in the Ideal Home,” 205.

In the 1937 and 1938 exhibitions, television has its own stand, marking the beginning of regular television in the UK, and the medium is at this time marketed in the exhibition as a spectacular, special and unusual technology, a grand novelty.<sup>91</sup>

However, although visitors to the trade fairs were presented with television as a ‘modern wonder,’ as it had been presented in the 1920s, they were also being asked to consider it as a domestic technology, which could live within their homes. An advert for Marconiphone in the 1938 brochure says: ‘The ideal home to-day has Television because to be really up-to-date to enjoy all that is going in this very wonderful modern world you must have television’(see Figure 2.6).<sup>92</sup> In the foreword to the 1938 catalogue for the Ideal Home Exhibition, the progress in television was celebrated, with visitors called upon to marvel upon the ‘miracle’ of television:

It will be fascinating to exercise your judgement upon this great achievement and to speculate about the future *in your own home* when the world’s events are whirled before you at *your fireside* [my italics].<sup>93</sup>

This clearly frames television consumption within a domestic setting, asking viewers to image the place of television within their homes and evoking the comfort of fireside viewing, which we shall see in later chapters is a dominant idealisation of television’s place in the home. This evoked the place of radio, which was also being framed as fireside entertainment in the late

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<sup>91</sup> Wheatley, “Television in the Ideal Home,” 211.

<sup>92</sup> “Marconiphone Television,” Marconiphone, advertisement, *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (1938), 53. in *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (1938), 9. *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition collection, V&A art and design archive, London. AAD/1990/9.

<sup>93</sup> “Foreword,” in *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (1938), 9. in *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (1938), 9. *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition collection, V&A art and design archive, London. AAD/1990/9.

1930s.<sup>94</sup> The emphasis placed upon the novelty of television associated television consumption with modernity in the home, with manufacturers and advertisements keen to make this connection, whilst simultaneously reassuring readers by relating television to the more familiar technology of radio and the comforting domestic image of the fireside.

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<sup>94</sup> In November 1936, the *Radio Times* had a special fireside issue. The introduction states: ‘it in these November evenings that we most appreciate the fireside radio. Safe in our little fortress, we have entertainment at our command.’ *Radio Times* (November 13, 1936), 3. For more discussion see Moores, “The Box on the Dresser” and Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves*.

# Marconiphone Television

The Ideal Home to-day has Television because to be really up-to-date and to enjoy all that is going in this very wonderful modern world you must have Television.

There is no more thrilling entertainment than having your own stage and cinema screen in your own home. Think of the exciting events that you are missing—Wimbledon Tennis, Championship fights, the Boat Race, the Lord Mayor's Show, etc., etc.—seeing and hearing them all just as they are happening. You can have the finest of all Television—a Marconiphone—for as little as 45 guineas—on Hire Purchase terms for as little as 10/6d. per week.

(Enquire at the Marconi Exhibit, Television section.)



THE MARCONIPHONE COMPANY LTD., RADIO HOUSE, TOTTENHAM COURT RD., W.1

Figure 2.6: Marconiphone advertisement in the *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue, V&A Art and Design archive

This was not, however, the only presentation of television. As John Law has argued, the development of 'big screen television' showed that television was still conceptualised as a medium for a large audience. As early as 1930, Baird had demonstrated big television on a screen which was five feet by two feet; these demonstrations were labelled as 'tele-talkies.'<sup>95</sup> Scophony and Philips both demonstrated large screen televisions in 1938. Law notes that these

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<sup>95</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*. Vol. 2, 551.

televisions were intended for communal use in spaces such as pubs, for watching sports events.<sup>96</sup> Scophony, however, believed the future of television was in the cinema: ‘its directors had convinced themselves that the future of television was in relaying important events into Britain’s cinemas for the huge audiences who attended these venues.’<sup>97</sup> While it was in the interests of a trade fair such as the Ideal Home Exhibition to present television as a domestic medium, manufacturers were still imagining different possibilities for television, which focused on its potential as a public medium, not a private one. Indeed, this trend continued after the Second World War; at the 1947 Ideal Home Exhibition, a 22-inch screen luxury television model was on display, which was intended for hotels and clubs, dubbed the ‘marvel of 1947.’<sup>98</sup> The ‘Telekinema’ exhibit at the Festival of Britain in 1951, which shall be explored shortly, was another post-war example of this large-scale articulation of television, indicating that this was not solely an interwar phenomenon. Again it is apparent that television’s primacy as a domestic medium had not yet been established.

Visitors to the trade fairs also received an education in how broadcasting operated behind the scenes, introducing them to the mechanics of production and transmission.<sup>99</sup> In 1938, a television studio was set up at the Ideal Home Exhibition to show visitors how television broadcasts worked. The catalogue explains:

In the matter of home entertainment, the eyes of the world are to-day focused upon the B.B.C. Television Service from the Alexandra Palace, for it is the only public service of its kind in existence. British enterprise, British brains and British capital

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<sup>96</sup> Law, 1938, 73.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (1947), 65. *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition collection, V&A art and design archive, London. AAD/1990/9.

<sup>99</sup> This was a trend that continued after the Second World War, with the BBC, and then ITV after 1955, both frequently featuring stands at the Ideal Home Exhibition, see Wheatley “Television in the Ideal Home.”

have combined to place television on the map – to give Britain scientific prestige that is the envy of every nation upon the earth.

It is therefore particularly appropriate that the Daily Mail Ideal Home show – the Mecca of Home Lovers – should afford the public the very first opportunity of seeing how this modern miracle of “pictures through space” is brought about.<sup>100</sup>

In this instance, the scientific achievement of television was used as the means to excite visitors about the new ‘home entertainment,’ naming television a ‘modern miracle.’ What is apparent here is that television’s positioning as technological wonder was not necessarily opposed to the construction of television as a domestic medium, as it had been in the Science Museum exhibition. In this instance, the construction of technological spectacle and domestic technology are combined to support and serve each other. The repetition of ‘British’ connects television consumption into a wider constructed narrative about Britain’s success as a country in the interwar period, thus framing consumption practices within a larger picture of national progress. This kind of rhetoric was reworked in the post-war period of reconstruction, as we shall see shortly. *Good Housekeeping* in 1949 stated that ‘people who “look in” at a television set in this country to-day are not only sharing in a commendable present but helping to build a great future for the entertainment of millions in their homes.’<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, the inclusion of a television studio, alongside the receivers, presented visitors with a joined-up understanding of how television worked as both technology and medium.

Nonetheless, a report in *Practical and Amateur Wireless* suggested that, despite great excitement about this exhibit at the 1938 Ideal Home Exhibition, it did not, once again, translate into television sales:

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<sup>100</sup> “Behind the scenes of television,” *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (1938), 249. *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition collection, V&A art and design archive, London. AAD/1990/9.

<sup>101</sup> Mary Benedetta, “Television Spreads its Wings,” *Good Housekeeping* (October, 1949), 73.

Although the special television demonstration at the Ideal Home Exhibition attracted large crowds, I am unaware that a great amount of business was done, and I think that is because the public is awaiting the production of better programmes. They have improved during the last month, but they are still not of a standard which will create a big demand.<sup>102</sup>

The poor quality of the broadcasts was again blamed for the lack of sales of television receivers. With the benefit of hindsight, it would appear that sales were, in fact, higher than ever before; 'more sets were sold between the beginning of October and Christmas 1938 than had been sold in the whole previous period of television history. The exact figure is unknown but it was probably between 5,000 and 6,500.'<sup>103</sup> By August 1939, between 20,000 and 25,000 sets were thought to be in use, suggesting that by the outbreak of the Second World War, television was finally beginning to proliferate into the home.<sup>104</sup>

#### BRITAIN CAN'T HAVE IT: TELEVISION AND POST-WAR AUSTERITY

The Second World War was undoubtedly a setback for the development of television in Britain. In 1939 the service was shut down and only resumed seven years later in 1946. Manufacturers turned their attention to the war effort, halting the production of receivers, and once the war was over resources were scarce and a period of austerity ensued. While it was apparent that television sets were increasingly understood as a consumer good by the outbreak of the Second World War, with consumer demand steadily increasing, its trajectory after the war did not simply pick up where it left off. This, however, was a myth that was perpetuated after the war.

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<sup>102</sup> Anon, 'On your wavelength by Thermion,' *Practical and Amateur Wireless* (May 14, 1938), 215.

<sup>103</sup> Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol. 2*, 620.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

An article in *Good Housekeeping* from 1946 described the BBC staff returning to Alexandra Place once the television service had resumed:

And yet they hardly spoke of those seven years, so quickly did they take things up where they left off. It was as though the gap had never happened and the same spirit of the future which is the spirit of television bound them as before.<sup>105</sup>

The reality was that television's continuation after the war was not necessarily guaranteed. Television's fate was presided over by a 'rather shadowy' committee of inquiry, led by Lord Hankey, who eventually agreed in favour of the television service continuing, which was sanctioned by the Labour government of the time.<sup>106</sup> In the immediate post-war period, television faced several challenges. Building on the interest generated in the pre-war years, television sets were in demand, yet post-war austerity and the export drive meant that consumers could not necessarily purchase one. In the post-war period, exhibitions, as before the war, remained important sites for encounters with television. Television continued to appear at trade fairs but also played a role at the government-backed exhibition Britain Can Make It (BCMI) in 1946. Television was presented to the visitors as a desirable addition to the home at exhibitions like Radiolympia, Ideal Home Exhibition and BCMI, but in reality sets were not readily available, thus, for the time being, television remained primarily in the public sphere.

Britain Can Make It (BCMI) was held in 1946 at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and was organised by the Council of Industrial Design (CoID), and attended by well over a

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<sup>105</sup> Mary Benedetta, "Look in at "Ally Pally,"" *Good Housekeeping* (November 1946), 5.

<sup>106</sup> Tim O'Sullivan, "Post-War Television in Britain: BBC and ITV," in *The Television History Book* ed. Michelle Hilmes (London: BFI, 2003), 31.

million visitors.<sup>107</sup> The CoID was established by the government in 1944 in order to promote better design practices in industry and to inform consumers about what ‘good’ design was.<sup>108</sup> BCMI, therefore, was a largely educational exhibition, however, the pedagogical function of the exhibition was to educate the public in consumer goods:

The Council of Industrial Design will hold in the summer of next year a national exhibition of design in all the main range of consumer goods – clothing, household furnishings and equipment, office equipment and civil transport... It will represent the best and only the best that modern British industry can produce... [it will be] British industry’s first great post-war gesture to the British people and the world.<sup>109</sup>

The purchase of these consumer goods was seen by the government as intrinsic to national recovery after the war, though the consumer was not to be the British people themselves, rather everything on display was aimed at the export market. As the supplementary guide to the exhibition *Design ‘46* explained:

This improvement of British design is an important factor – a very important factor – in our attempt to re-establish and increase our export markets. Many of the goods that you will see in the Exhibition are not for the moment available in the shops – they have not had time to get there, and it is important for us that they be used to purchase the food and raw materials without which we can neither live nor work.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Becky E. Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation’: The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 50.

<sup>108</sup> Elizabeth Darling, “BCMI Introduction,” *Display and National Identity 1946-1967*, online resource, available at [https://vads.ac.uk/learning/designingbritain/html/bcmi\\_intro.html](https://vads.ac.uk/learning/designingbritain/html/bcmi_intro.html) accessed 14/03/2017.

<sup>109</sup> Policy committee meeting minutes, quoted in Darling “BCMI Introduction.”

<sup>110</sup> Stafford Cripps, “Foreword,” *Britain ‘46* (London: Council of Industrial Design, 1946), 5.

The consumer culture that was developing in the 1930s was held in stasis after the war as Britain began the process of recovery, yet it was felt necessary to educate consumers for a projected future. The irony of an exhibition displaying consumer goods that could not be purchased was not lost on the press and the public; the exhibition was dubbed ‘Britain Can’t Have It.’<sup>111</sup>

For television sets it was no different, the demand for sets far exceeded production in the late 1940s, and most of the public could not afford a set or did not live in the television reception area of Southeast England, therefore, spaces such as BCMI continued to be key places for interaction with television. Television appeared at BCMI in a section entitled ‘radio and gramophones.’<sup>112</sup> Television had found its place among the domestic technologies associated with leisure. As we shall see in the next chapter, BCMI and the CoID’s main concern lay with television cabinet design, which reflected on an understanding of television’s place in the home as a designed object. One television set on display at the exhibition was designed by Eden Minns and was in fact labelled a ‘television projector’ rather than set or receiver. The description in the catalogue handbook says:

In a few years television will be as common a form of domestic entertainment as sightless radio is now [...] Working with technical knowledge, Mr Eden Minns has designed a set that will include a picture of 20-in. by 16in. [...] Doors close across the apparatus so that its appearance does not clash with other furniture in

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<sup>111</sup> Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation*, 50.

<sup>112</sup> *Britain Can Make It: Exhibition Catalogue* (Published for the Council of Industrial Design by His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1946), 3. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton, GB-1837-DCA-14A-17.

the room. When opened, the doors swing aside to make a proscenium setting to the picture.<sup>113</sup>

This television projector was clearly framed as ‘a form of domestic entertainment,’ compared to the established home entertainment medium of radio, and the ubiquity of television’s position in the home was clearly envisioned. The design of the projector as furniture is also emphasised, showing that television’s conceptualisation as an object prefigured its domestic function. Visitors to the exhibition were also asked to judge the cabinet design of radio and television sets, which were displayed along a wall; they were being asked to critique the design of television and to think about how that design might fit into their own homes. The tone, however, of television’s articulation at BCMI is slightly different to the trade fairs in the late 1930s; while visitors at BCMI were asked to imagine television as a domestic form of entertainment that they might one day have in their homes, they were not being directly addressed as consumers, as none of the visitors were expected to buy the sets on display.

We find a similar story at the trade fairs Ideal Home Exhibition and Radiolympia in these early years after the war. The excitement that had surrounded television at the Ideal Home Exhibition in the late 1930s appeared more muted after the war, with the focus returned to radio and only small attention paid to television in the catalogues from 1947-49. At the 1947 Ideal Home exhibition, there was only a ‘Radio and Television section,’ showing the latest receivers, but nothing so spectacular as the television studio that had been shown in 1938. At Radiolympia, the radio and television sets on show were no longer aimed at the domestic visitors attending the show. A British Pathé newsreel of Radiolympia from 1947 explained to viewers that the television and radio receivers on show were being aimed at a foreign export market, from which

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<sup>113</sup> *Britain Can Make It: Catalogue Supplement* (Published for the Council of Industrial Design by His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1946), 213. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton, GB-1837-DCA-14A-17

one million pounds a month was being earned, showing the place of radio and television in the economic recovery effort after the war.<sup>114</sup> Even at trade fairs, the domestic market was no longer the prime target as it had been before the war, showing the changed landscape of consumerism in the immediate years after the war. By March 1947, the number of operating sets was still estimated at 20,000, showing no gains on the 1939 figures.<sup>115</sup>

This idea of consumers and consumer goods *anticipating* a time where consumption might once again be able to take place was reflected in magazine advertising, where products were advertised despite not yet being available.<sup>116</sup> Even during the war, television manufacturers had advertised their television and radio sets in magazines, even though none of the sets were actually available to buy. Hartley explains that:

Manufacturers like GEC, Marconi and Mullard wanted consumer-demand to build up a head of steam in readiness for the post-war release of consumer goods; they wanted potential consumers to remember their own brand name; and they wanted to associate the values and virtues of war with their products.<sup>117</sup>

Considering that sixteen manufacturers had exhibited their television sets at Radiolympia in the two years before the war, it is particularly striking to consider that after the war these manufacturers no longer had any wares to sell. It highlights just how much the manufacturers had to re-build after the war, yet the fact that there remained a large interest in television after

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<sup>114</sup> “Radiolympia exhibitions opens 1947,” British Pathé video, 2:49, available at <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/radiolympia-exhibition-opens/query/radiolympia> [accessed May 8, 2017].

<sup>115</sup> Tim O’Sullivan, “Post-War Television in Britain: BBC and ITV,” 31.

<sup>116</sup> Examples of these advertisements can be found in, to name but a few, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ideal Home*, *Homes and Gardens* and *Woman*.

<sup>117</sup> Hartley, *Uses of Television*, 84.

the war, suggests that this was building on the momentum gained in the 1936-39 period. Maurice Gorham (Head of the BBC Television Service in 1946), writing in 1952, stated that:

There were no sets. There was no such thing as ‘sales resistance’ in those early years; every dealer had waiting-lists and every set that left the manufacturers found its way into a home, but supply fell short of demand.<sup>118</sup>

An article in *Good Housekeeping* from 1949 concurred with this analysis, writing that ‘already there are 60,000 privately owned sets in South-East England and a considerable waiting list, for production of sets is still far below the demand.’<sup>119</sup> Tim O’Sullivan cites 1949 as the year that supply finally caught up with demand for television sets, with 1,000 sets produced a day, but highlights another series of problems facing British television at this point. He cites the lack of investment from the BBC in television as a contributing factor to its slow development, as well hostility from other bodies such as the Newspaper Society, the film industry, and various sporting institutions, which would not allow television coverage.<sup>120</sup>

The Second World War placed television’s development in Britain in stasis; television had been on the cusp of domestication at the outbreak of war and a decade later remained in the same position. What is important to note, however, is that the public interest and the cultural framework for television’s domestication were largely in place by this point; all that was required were more television sets and consumers with enough money to buy them.

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<sup>118</sup> Quoted in O’Sullivan, “Post-war Television in Britain,” 31.

<sup>119</sup> Benedetta, “Television Spreads its Wings,” 73.

<sup>120</sup> O’Sullivan, “Post-war Television in Britain,” 31.

## THE BEGINNING OF THINGS TO COME? TELEVISION AND THE SPECTACLE OF PROGRESS AT THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN

At the Festival of Britain in 1951, television took on a much larger role than it had at BCMI and, in many ways, the versions of television on show at the Festival reimagined the various ways television had been understood before the war, turning it into a symbol of national progress, past and present. A major development in television's history was the opening of the Sutton Coldfield transmitter in 1949, which meant that, for the first time, the Midlands could receive television, extending the physical reach of the television service. Television's proliferation into regional areas meant that it was more fitting for the national focus of the Festival of Britain. As O'Sullivan notes, 1949 also marked a turning point for the supply of television sets, suggesting that, by the beginning of the 1950s, television's development was entering a new phase, which saw its culmination in the huge sales precipitated by Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953. The BBC's Head of Television, Maurice Gorham, stated in 1952:

Television began again from nowhere and suddenly revealed itself as a power to be reckoned with. Between 1945 and 1950 it passed from being a scientific achievement, a futuristic novelty, into being a successful rival to the older medium [i.e. radio] as a source of entertainment for the modern home [...] The future had changed hands. The fact was that people wanted to look as well as to listen.<sup>121</sup>

Television's multiple presentation at the Festival of Britain, therefore, was prescient of the varied ways in which television was going to become an integral part of both civic and private life in Britain.

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<sup>121</sup> Quoted in Tim O'Sullivan, "Post-War Television in Britain: BBC and ITV," 31.

Like BCMI, the Festival of Britain was part of the reconstruction effort in post-war Britain.

Wheatley writes:

It was conceived of as a wide-ranging celebration of Britain's contribution to science, technology, industrial design, architecture and the arts on the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851, and as a way to stimulate (or simulate) national recovery in the aftermath of World War II.<sup>122</sup>

The scale of the Festival was much larger than any of the other exhibitions discussed here and, unlike most of the other examples, was a national, rather than London-based, exhibition. Becky Conekin describes the immense scale of the exhibition:

There were nine official, government-funded exhibitions in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, twenty-three designated arts festivals, as well as a pleasure garden in Battersea. Eight and a half million people visited the London South Bank exhibition and the BBC aired 2,700 Festival-related broadcasts. On the local level, close to two thousand cities, towns and villages across the United Kingdom organised and funded a Festival event of some kind.<sup>123</sup>

Embracing the interwar period's love of display, the Festival provided a spectacle of national progress for the British public, for which television played a central role, as Wheatley has already argued in her work on spectacular television.<sup>124</sup> The majority of information about television's place at the festival suggests, however, that it was focused around the Southbank

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<sup>122</sup> Wheatley, *Spectacular Television*, 25.

<sup>123</sup> Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation*, '4.

<sup>124</sup> Wheatley, *Spectacular Television*.

site in London. Wheatley provides a nearly comprehensive account of the place of television at the Festival of Britain, noting its varied appearance across the Southbank exhibition, including in the Television pavilion, which focused on television's history, the Telekinema, which offered wide screen television in a theatrical setting, the themed outside broadcasts televised by the BBC, and television's appearance in the Transport and Communication pavilion.<sup>125</sup> The only aspect which is not discussed at length is television's place in the Homes and Gardens pavilion, where television was on display in the room settings designed by popular contemporary designers.<sup>126</sup> Importantly, Wheatley identifies the role that television played in the festival's rhetoric wherein 'science, arts and commerce are combined to spectacular effect.'<sup>127</sup> Television was used to encapsulate the Festival's wider 'agenda for bringing about a modern and scientifically assisted version of the future in Britain.'<sup>128</sup> In order to expand on Wheatley's research, this section will consider how television's positioning at the Festival built upon the various ways television had *already* been presented in the interwar period. It will argue that the Festival re-imagined television's role in the future of post-war Britain through the lens of an already-constructed narrative about television. It will also argue that it was in the Homes and Gardens pavilion where television was presented less as a spectacle and 'modern wonder' and more as a domestic object, integrated into the Festival's vision for post-war domesticity. This, arguably, marks the end of television's public articulation as invention and spectacle, before it predominantly came to be understood as a consumer good destined for the home.

A pavilion dedicated to television at the exhibition aimed to educate visitors about the history of television, much as the Science Museum's 'Television' exhibition in 1937 had done. Visitors

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<sup>125</sup> Wheatley, *Spectacular Television*, 26-32.

<sup>126</sup> The Council of Industrial Design archive at the University of Brighton contains photographs of the Homes and Gardens pavilion, showing television in the room displays.

<sup>127</sup> Wheatley, *Spectacular Television*, 26.

<sup>128</sup> Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation*, '73.

to this would have been greeted with a ‘shop window,’ which was ‘designed to present to the visitors an exciting abstract of the wonders of television depicted inside the Pavilion.’<sup>129</sup> As it had been in the 1920s at Baird’s demonstrations, television was once again being shown as a ‘modern wonder.’ In a letter from Norman Collins, television controller at the BBC, to the pavilion’s curator, Malcolm Baker Smith, it is revealed that this was expected to be many visitors’ first encounter with television.<sup>130</sup> Thus, over two decades after its first demonstrations, television still remained a novelty and a spectacle. However, as with the Science Museum exhibition, the pavilion intended to inform visitors about the medium, educating them about the science behind the invention. In his letter to Malcolm Baker Smith, Norman Collins wrote:

As I understand it, what is required is a broad, popular, historical treatment for Television from Baird days up to the present, with a peep into the foreseeable future [...] I see the whole thing amounting to a survey which starts with Baird’s spinning disc, moves forward through the various E.M.I. developments and, in parallel with the Engineering side, shows, possibly by a series of model studios, the progress from single to multiple camera production.<sup>131</sup>

Ten subsections were included in the exhibition, ranging from Baird’s early apparatus in the 1920s up until the opening of the new transmitter at Sutton Coldfield in 1949, which brought television to the Midlands. The main theme linking these subsections was the ‘pioneering work of British inventive skill and achievement,’<sup>132</sup> showing that the display intended to weave a narrative around television that was indicative of British technological success. Visitors were

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<sup>129</sup> “Festival of Britain 1951: Theme for Television Display in Pavilion S.B. 15,” written document, (n.d.), 1. BBC WAC, Caversham, T14/439.

<sup>130</sup> Norman Collins to Malcolm Baker Smith, letter (February 11, 1950). BBC WAC, Caversham, T14/439.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> “Festival of Britain 1951: Theme for Television Display in Pavilion S.B. 15,” written document, (n.d.), 2. BBC WAC, Caversham, T14/439.

asked to consider television as a technical achievement in this part of the exhibition, and elsewhere. Television receivers, cathode ray tubes, camera tubes and other objects relating to television's history were also on display in the Transport and Communications pavilion, which similarly asked visitors to view television as part of a progressive narrative involving technology and media. As visitors to the Science Museum in the 1930s would have experienced, television was presented at these two pavilions, in both the context of its historical narrative, but also in terms of its future development, as well as in terms of other scientific developments that were deemed to be shaping the modern world. Likewise, the dual aspect of television – its production and reception – were also put on display, which had already been part of television's display at the 1938 Ideal Home Exhibition. In this way, the Festival was presenting visitors with a holistic understanding of television as a combination of programming, transmission and reception, a coalescence that had taken place in the interwar period.

Visitors to the television pavilion ended their experience in the Telekinema, 'a specially designed cinema designed to project new and experimental forms,' which was considered 'to be a model of the cinema of the future, capable of exhibiting both chemical film images and electronical images.'<sup>133</sup> As previously mentioned, Baird had already demonstrated the 'tele-talkie' in 1930, which similarly infused the monikers of both film and television, but instead opting for the more informal name of 'talkies' for the sound films of that era. The Telekinema re-imagined Scophony's large screen version of television that foresaw television as functioning as a public medium rather than a private one. While the Telekinema built on an established idea of public television, the Festival was one of the last places where such an idea was shown on such a large scale. Indeed, the television projectors on sale in this period, made by companies such as Valradio, were intended for domestic use, providing a more cinematic

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<sup>133</sup> Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation*, ' 55.

experience from within the comfort of the living room. As Wheatley has discussed, what was popular about the Telekinema was the prospect of seeing yourself on screen, which foreshadowed a specific form of television programming, namely the TV talent show.<sup>134</sup> Thus the large screen form of television – an alternate imagining of the television set as something other than a domestic technology – made its final appearance at the Festival of Britain.

The most accurate portrayal of the future of the television set, which for the purposes of this thesis is most relevant, was to be found in the Homes and Gardens pavilion. Indeed, this presentation of television was in many ways new, as it marked a presentation of television in a solely domestic context. In the ideal room settings, television was presented as an object on display amongst the other objects and furniture that were deemed necessary for the modern post-war home. Photographs from the Council of Industrial Design archive show television featured in three of the room settings, though in each, the television set was not the focus nor made a spectacle of. The spectacle was the room as a whole; the designs show television as an integrated object, one of many other electrical items on display, including the radio, the stereo and various lighting apparatuses. The idealised integration of television into the living room will be the theme of later chapters in the thesis, where more detail about these examples will be explored, but it is important to note that television had now become a staple in the state-funded conceptualisation of the modern home. While manufacturers and trade fairs had already presented television as a primarily domestic form of entertainment before the war, this state-sponsored presentation of the medium marked a turning point for television. Domesticity was an important focal point for the Festival – the household was viewed as a ‘strategic site for [the] new politics of culture’<sup>135</sup> – so the fact that the Festival welcomed television into that ideal marks a critical stamp of approval for its post-war development.

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<sup>134</sup> Wheatley, *Spectacular Television*, 39.

<sup>135</sup> Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation*, 49.

## CONCLUSION

In the urban metropolis of 1920s London, the public were first introduced to the ‘modern wonder’ of television. Over the next three decades, at exhibitions, demonstrations and trade fairs, ideas about what television would be, and how it would function, were formed, re-worked, and rejected. As we have seen, within this public negotiation, technology and medium coalesced, with the development of the television service and technology converging to form a more concrete idea of what television would become. Manufacturers, more than the broadcasters, pushed this relationship, seeing the connection between the quality of programming and sale of sets. In the 1930s, manufacturers were frequently frustrated by the lack of investment from the BBC in television, which meant that television sales remained low. Without a regular television service, as Wheatley and Hartley have both discussed, the people were most likely to encounter television in the public sphere, where they will have formed opinions about the potentials of the new technology. Television was one of many spectacles someone might have encountered in the 1930s era of display, with technology frequently heralded as the purveyor of the modern era. However, once the regular television service began in 1936, actual sales of television receivers began to increase. With more manufacturers producing sets, which were put on display at trade fairs, television was increasingly positioned as a consumer good for the home, marking a transition away from television’s presentation as a modern wonder. By 1939, I have argued, television was on the cusp of domestication, but the outbreak of Second World War stalled this progress, leaving television in a period of stasis after the service resumed in 1946. Arguably, without the momentum that was built in the period between 1936-9 in the public sphere, there might not have been such a high demand for television sets in the early post-war years, when supply could not meet demand. Potential consumers of television were left wanting, when the majority of receivers made in Britain were sold to the export market. Thus, in the post-war period, television reappeared as a spectacle at exhibitions and trade fairs, as the economic reality prevented any other alternative. However,

by 1951, there had been a shift; supply was finally meeting demand and the opening of the Sutton Coldfield television transmitter gave a new swathe of the country access to the television service. Television was presented to visitors at the Festival of Britain as a symbol of continuity and progress; an emblem of British scientific and cultural achievement, which would bring the domestic sphere into the future. The Festival reimagined the versions of television that had been seen before the war – television as public spectacle, wondrous invention and domestic commodity – for the post-war reconstruction effort.

The multiple imagining of television in the public sphere that preceded its domestication should play an important part in our understanding of television's development as both a domestic medium and object. It is indicative of the process that a technology has to undergo to become a domestic commodity, a process which is never pre-determined; social, economic and cultural factors all determine the shape and form of a representational technology, to borrow Rieger's term. We have seen how television faced many challenges, not least from the BBC, which, though it might not have halted television's development entirely in Britain, certainly could have stalled it for far longer. Histories of early television have not taken enough account of the role of manufacturers and exhibitors in bringing television to the attention of the public and for pushing for the coalescence of medium and technology, to form the idea of television as a domestic medium that persisted after the 1950s. In this way, the interwar period of television's development should be seen as more than an epilogue to television's later progress in the post-war era, as it was in this period that frameworks for how television would function as a domestic medium and object-technology were laid down. All of which played a role in the process of television's domestication.

## CHAPTER 3. CONSUMING THE TELEVISION SET

### INTRODUCTION

In 1947, only 20,000 television sets were in operation in Britain, with less than 1% of the population able to view. By the early 1960s, that figure was at over 85% and 10.5 million sound and vision licenses were owned.<sup>1</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, television had been established as a domestic technology in the 1930s, but the mass proliferation of the television set into the home did not gain momentum until the early 1950s. Our general understanding of television's progress as a commodity is that, at first, television was a luxury good, owned only by the wealthiest consumers, while Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953 caused sales to spike dramatically, diffusing television across Britain.<sup>2</sup> John Corner marks 1956 as the turning point when 'the ownership or rental of the television set was [...] out of the stage of being a marker of status [...] TV was on the way to becoming a standard feature of every home.'<sup>3</sup> The mass consumption of television was not, however, an inevitability and the trajectory from niche commodity to a mass-owned domestic object can bear more scrutiny. To further our understanding of the widespread take-up of television in the 1950s, this chapter will assess how television's domestication was shaped by how it was positioned and understood as a consumer good from the 1930s onwards. The previous chapter showed how television developed into a consumer good destined for the home, but only after a variety of ideas about its usage were put forward. This chapter will determine that, once television was established as a domestic medium and object-technology, it was then necessary to entice consumers into obtaining a set, which was another stage in the process of television's domestication. This had two phases:

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<sup>1</sup> Tim O'Sullivan, "Researching the Viewing Culture: Television and the Home 1946-60" in *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*, ed. Helen Wheatley (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 162.

<sup>2</sup> See *Ibid* and Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> John Corner, *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: BFI, 1991), 6.

firstly, television had to be positioned – by manufacturers, designers, advertisers and magazines – as a must-have domestic consumer good. Secondly, television had to be understood by consumers as a desirable commodity; without the consumer’s decision to acquire a set, television could not have become the widespread domestic medium it became. This sits in opposition to the pervasive idea that the television service was a public utility, offered through the BBC’s public service broadcasting remit. The television set – the instrument necessary to receive that public utility – was a commodity, necessarily rooted in consumer culture.

This chapter will trace how the television set was positioned and understood as a domestic consumer good from the early adoption of the technology in the 1930s up until the late 1960s, when colour television went on sale, encompassing television’s transformation from luxury object-technology to a commonplace one. Before 1950, television receivers were arguably a niche commodity; they were expensive, the cabinet was bulky, but the screen was small, and only a small percentage of potential consumers could receive the television service. The opening of the television mast at Sutton Coldfield in December 1949 marked a shift for television’s diffusion as a commodity; the service’s reach extended to the Midlands, incentivising more consumers to consider investing in a television set. Nonetheless, the television service was still geographically limited. For the North, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and much of the west of England, television was inaccessible until the early 1950s. Thus, before the 1950s, though the television service was national in name, it remained specifically regional, as economic and geographical reasons kept television out of the reach of most of the population. However, while the sales of television sets were low before 1950 – BBC statistics show that by 1949 only 126,567 sound and vision licenses were sold<sup>4</sup> – a

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<sup>4</sup> Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Volume 4: Sound and Vision*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 221

consumer culture began to develop around the television set. As the previous chapter showed, television manufacturer Baird had been working to sell their sets since the early 1930s, but it was from 1936, with the opening of the regular BBC television service, that television sets were systematically put on sale and marketed. It is worth examining this early consumer culture around television because, as we shall see, it is here that many of the foundations for its domestication were laid down.

Various scholars from across sociology and media studies have recognised the importance of examining the consumption of objects, or ‘things in motion’ as Arjun Appadurai describes it, arguing that this is where meaning can be excavated.<sup>5</sup> This chapter, therefore, will examine the transactional stage at which the television set was bought and sold, which Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, in their essay on the domestication of media objects, label ‘appropriation.’<sup>6</sup> Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley argue that how a media object is domesticated depends on the ‘moral economy of the household’; the beliefs and values held by the household dictate how a media object is appropriated and subsequently used. This chapter will use the concept of the ‘moral economy’ to assess how consumers made the decision to acquire their first television set and how, in this process, they attributed value to television. In addition to this, the consumer culture, which developed around television, conferred another set of values and meanings onto television as a domestic object, all of which formed part of how television was domesticated. This builds on the three interrelated dimensions that Roger Silverstone and Leslie Haddon lay out for considering the relationship between design and domestication, of which the last two are most applicable here:

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 1: Literature Review.

<sup>6</sup> Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, “Information and Communication Technologies,” 22.

The second dimension is what might be called constructing the user. In this sense of design, images of eventual users are incorporated into the fabric of the object, but at the same time users are designed themselves – as ideal or as necessary to complete both the function and vision embodied in the artefact. The third dimension of design involves catching the consumer. This places design as a central component of the wider economic and social processes of commodification and indicates the importance of recognizing both the central role that technology plays in the consuming culture of modern capitalism and the role of the market in defining the status and meaning of technology.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, in examining how television accrued value and meaning in the consumption process, it is necessary to consider the intersectional relationship between consumer, commodity and consumer culture.

Media scholars have considered television's relationship to consumer culture largely in relation to the advent of commercial television in 1955.<sup>8</sup> This analysis has focused on textual and institutional source material, which points to the creation of ITV as a key turning point for television's relationship to consumer culture. Indeed, Johnson and Turnock have demonstrated that academic study of ITV has been lacking precisely because of its association with consumerism, mass culture, and a perceived lack of 'quality.'<sup>9</sup> While the arrival of commercial

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<sup>7</sup> Leslie Haddon and Roger Silverstone, "Design and the Domestication of Information and Communication Technologies: Technical Change and Everyday Life" in *Communication by Design: The Politics of Information and Communication Technologies*, eds. Robin Mansell and Roger Silverstone (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 45. See also, Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch, eds., *How Users Matter: The Co-Construction of Users and Technologies* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Rob Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture: Britain and the Transformation of Modernity* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Janet Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture: Men, Women and the Box* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004)

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock, eds., *ITV Cultures: Independent Television Over Fifty Years* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2005).

television intensified the debates around television and consumer culture, this chapter aims to show that television's object form became embedded in consumer culture from the point at which it went on sale in the 1930s. As the television set itself became a mass consumed object in the 1950s, anxieties developed around how to tastefully consume it; a debate emerged centred on design practices and consumption, rather than what was shown on television. Recognising this furthers our understanding of television's relationship to consumerism more broadly; while the television service was run under a public service ethos, the means to watch it – the set – was a manufactured good embedded in consumer practices. Keith Geddes has provided a history of television's trajectory from invention to commodity, while media scholars such as Helen Wheatley and Deborah Chambers have already highlighted the importance of examining television as a consumer good.<sup>10</sup> Wheatley has examined how television was positioned to consumers at mid-century exhibitions and Chambers has argued that television design helped to articulate its position as a domestic object.<sup>11</sup> This chapter will argue that in the process of domestication, the television set was necessarily inserted into consumer culture. It will add to our understanding of the proliferation of television in Britain and how it quickly grew from a niche commodity into one of the most widely-owned household technologies.

The first section will show that television was first positioned as a luxury good in the 1930s, through its design and marketing, aimed at a niche audience, and that this persisted even once television had become a more commonplace consumer good in the 1950s. However, as television became more commonly owned, different kinds of television sets were designed and marketed in order to appeal to specific consumer groups, such as design-conscious middle class consumers and women. As television developed into a mass-owned commodity, the design of

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<sup>10</sup> Keith Geddes and Gordon Bussey, *The Setmakers: A History of the Radio and Television Industry* (London: BREMA, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Helen Wheatley, "Television in the Ideal Home" in *Television for Women: New Directions*, eds. Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 205-222; Deborah Chambers, *Changing Media, Homes and Households: Cultures, Technologies and Meanings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

television receivers became part of the post-war debate about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ design, becoming imbued with certain connotations of class and taste, as well as gender. The concept of ‘distinction’ was a key trope in promotional material for receivers; different kinds of receivers were positioned as a means of demonstrating certain versions of taste and lifestyle in an attempt to legitimate the television set as a consumer good.

The second section of this chapter will consider how television was understood as a domestic consumer good, examining how consumers acquired their first sets and the perceived value that they put on television. It will become apparent that the consumer’s understanding of television as a consumer good was, in many ways, at odds with how television had been positioned by designers and in marketing. As one of many consumer goods aimed at the home flooding the market, consumers had to make their own decisions about how to prioritise television, developing personal value judgements about it as a commodity. Both how television was positioned and how it was understood as a commodity were vital stages in television’s domestication; television had to be constructed as a consumer good in order for it to enter the home.

## METHODOLOGY

To assess how television was positioned as a domestic consumer good, this chapter utilises promotional material, including marketing brochures issued by television manufacturers, from the National Science and Media Museum archive, as well as advertisements, found in lifestyle magazines, to understand how the manufacturers, through marketing, promoted their wares and aimed to entice consumers. I have uncovered a small amount of material in the John Lewis Partnership archive relating to how their department stores sold television sets. In addition to this analysis of promotional material, the chapter will examine how lifestyle and design magazines discussed the arrival of television and how they offered advice to potential consumers. This provides insight into the mediated narratives that emerged about television,

which shaped the ‘horizons of expectations’ of consumers.<sup>12</sup> I have sampled a range of magazines, from high-end monthlies such as *Ideal Home* and *Good Housekeeping*, aimed at a middle class readership, to widely read weeklies such as *Woman* and *Woman’s Own*, which spoke to a lower middle class and working class readership.<sup>13</sup> The monthly magazines contain articles advising consumers on what television to buy as well as containing several advertisements for television sets. The Council of Industrial Design’s (CoID) monthly publication *Design* featured many articles about the design of television receivers and provides evidence of the dominant top-down narrative about television design from one of the key arbiters of taste in the post-war period.

In order to establish how television was understood as a domestic consumer good, this chapter will use two Mass Observation (MO) directives from 1949 and 2003. The former provides insight into how potential consumers of television talked about the new medium and their expectations about it. The directive came just before the mass take-up of television and so provides evidence about attitudes towards television when it was still a relatively unfamiliar medium and object-technology. The 2003 directive offers us with memories of how television was first acquired and how, with respondents writing about how they themselves, or their parents, made the decision on whether to obtain a television set.

## PART 1: MARKETING AND DESIGNING TELEVISION

### NICHE COMMODITY: MARKETING EARLY TELEVISION SETS

The concept of ‘distinction’ in how television sets were positioned as consumer goods initially emerged in the pre-war period, when sets first went on sale. Manufacturers, as we saw in the previous chapter, were keen to promote television sets as domestic objects and aimed to sell

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<sup>12</sup> Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Post-war America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> See methodology section in the introduction.

their wares on the market. Manufacturers of television attempted to shape televisions into a domestic friendly object-technology by designing television receivers that resembled furniture. Radio had undergone a similar transformation from a gadget into a domestic commodity. Manufacturers and retailers had seen radio's potential as a home entertainment, which required the image of radio to undergo a makeover in the mind of consumers. Seminal sets such as the E.K. Cole set shown at the 1934 Radiolympia helped to transform the radio set into a 'standardized, reasonably inexpensive, mass-produced commodity.'<sup>14</sup> This set marked a departure from the more homogenous design practice for receivers. Scannell and Cardiff point to how, previously, manufacturers had designed radio receivers to resemble furniture:

From the late twenties the radio industry began to encase its products in wooden cabinets which were, in most cases, designed by outside firms of cabinet-makers and made to look like other pieces of furniture. Taken to its limits this approach led some manufacturers to conceal their sets in other items of furniture – in an armchair, or art deco grandfather clock, for instance.<sup>15</sup>

Roger Silverstone and Leslie Haddon consider this to be a form of 'pre-domestication': 'an anticipation in the design itself of the artefact's likely place (in this case) the home, and an attempt to offer a solution *in the design of the object itself* to the contradictions generated within the process of technical innovation.'<sup>16</sup> From the late 1930s, this same approach was applied to television cabinet design and it was common to see television receivers encased in a wooden cabinet with doors. As Deborah Chambers explains:

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<sup>14</sup> Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting: Volume One 1922-1939 Serving the Nation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 359.

<sup>15</sup> Scannell and Cardiff, *A Social History of Broadcasting*, 360.

<sup>16</sup> Leslie Haddon and Roger Silverstone, "Design and the Domestication of Information and Communication Technologies: Technical Change and Everyday Life" in *Communication by Design: The Politics of Information and Communication Technologies*, eds. Robin Mansell and Roger Silverstone (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 49.

The taming of this troubled yet desirable artefact was achieved, initially, by camouflaging the machine as furniture. Manufacturers recognised that for this novel technology to be accepted into the home, the TV gadget must be hidden in a cabinet. The role of radio cabinet makers was to cage the monster eye in a crafted wooden cabinet. Some were even styled with closing doors to conceal the gaping eye of the screen when not in use.<sup>17</sup>

The alien nature of television was symbolically diminished by its semblance to furniture. Furthermore, the common addition of doors provided a physical boundary between the home and the television, which could literally close off the television from the home. From 1936, advertisements and brochures were published to promote television sets, which situated television as a consumer good. Television's position as a niche commodity was emphasised in the promotional material, with adverts and brochures highlighting the exclusivity of their products. Sets were presented in advertisements and brochures as either scientific instruments of the highest calibre or luxurious handcrafted objects of beauty.

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<sup>17</sup> Deborah Chambers, "The Material Form of the Television Set: A Cultural History," *Media History* 17, vol. 17 (August 2011), 362.



**THE ETHER EMPEROR TELEVISION RADIO  
GRAMOPHONE**

Model E4518. The most comprehensive and ambitious instrument yet produced. 45 Valves Total. Radio—Television—Gramophone.

*Dimensions: Height 47 ins., Width 44 ins., Depth 23 ins.*

**Price 175 guineas.**

Figure 3.1: Dynatron Brochure, c. 1938/9, National Science and Media Museum

Television manufacturer Dynatron, for example, offered bespoke cabinets for a discerning consumer. A brochure for Dynatron products from the late 1930s built its description of its radio and television cabinets on a nostalgic look at the past:

Once upon a time, many years ago, our forefathers lived in an age when time was not very important [...] They gave their energies, regardless of time, to create the finest examples of good taste and workmanship [...]

Dynatron engineers, while agreeing it is possible to mass produce radio to a certain standard, know that it is quite impossible to build highly efficient and supreme instruments with machine construction. We have built DYNATRON receivers in the same spirit as the craftsmen of the past have created their work.<sup>18</sup>

Rather than highlighting the technical ability of the set, the brochure aims to appeal to a consumer who appreciated personalised, high quality manufacturing. The brochure is keen to separate the television and radio receivers from ‘mass production,’ offering instead a product that was handcrafted and unique. This shows an early indication of the anxieties around television’s position as a mass produced good. However, in this early period of television’s history, television remained an exclusive object, if only because it was inaccessible to most of the country. The Dynatron catalogue sought to highlight this exclusivity by naming its sets after royalty and aristocracy. For example, the ‘Ether emperor television radio gramophone’ model E4318 offered consumers with an all-in-one media cabinet, which would cost the huge sum of 175 guineas.<sup>19</sup> The image besides the description shows a huge, domineering piece of furniture, with doors hiding any of the technical components (see Figure 3.1). The presentation

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<sup>18</sup> Dynatron brochure (c. 1938/9). National Science and Media Museum, Bradford.

<sup>19</sup> To put this into context, the average salary in the 1930s was £200 per year, so this television set would cost nearly a year’s wages, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/4203686.stm> [accessed 6 July 2017].

of television as luxury commodity was also reflected in the ways in which television was put on display in stores in the 1930s. A photograph from 1939 from John Lewis shows television sets displayed on plinths like trophies (see Figure 3.2).<sup>20</sup>



Figure 3.2: Televisions on the John Lewis shop floor on Oxford Street, London 1939, John Lewis Partnership archive

Although the styling of the cabinets to resemble furniture was evidently a means to make the technologies of both radio and television domestic-friendly, early marketing material for television receivers show that the ‘gadgeteer’ phase that both television and radio had undergone still had traction.<sup>21</sup> The celebration of scientific aspects of the technology, which were discussed in the previous chapter, found their way into the promotional material for receivers. Advertisements for television receivers in the 1930s sought to promote their

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<sup>20</sup> John Lewis shop floor, Oxford Street store, photograph (1939). John Lewis Partnership archive, Cookham, 2131/b 24.

<sup>21</sup> For the gadgeteer phase of radio see Shaun Moores, “The Box on the Dresser: Memories of Early Radio and Everyday Life,” *Media, Culture and Society* 10, no.1 (January 1988); Cardiff and Scannell, *A Social History of Broadcasting*; Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012).

technical ability, suggesting that the consumer being addressed was seen to have an interest in, or need to be assured about, the technological quality of the sets. An advert for G.E.C. television receivers, which appeared in *The Radio Times* special edition on the coming of television in 1936, used the tagline ‘from research to production.’ It explains to its reader that the ‘G.E.C. Television receivers owe much of their success to the intensive research carried out at the world-famous G.E.C. Research Laboratories at Wembley.’<sup>22</sup> The advert, rather than promoting the television sets as furniture within the home, shows images of inside the factory and G.E.C. transmitting room, alongside images of the receivers they have produced. An advertisement for H.M.V. television receivers from the same edition of the *Radio Times* takes the same approach and uses the tag line ‘from the laboratory in 1931 to the home in 1936.’ The text explains that their engineers had been working in secrecy at their laboratory in Hayes, Middlesex, until they reached their engineering objective.<sup>23</sup> As with the G.E.C. advertisement, this advertisement is keen to present the image of highly trained engineers working for a long duration to develop the technology into a suitable state for home consumption. The receiver design is referenced, but the main selling point emphasised is that these sets are engineered to a high standard.<sup>24</sup>

This is demonstrative of the kind of convergence of television as scientific achievement and home entertainment, which the previous chapter has shown was common in the 1930s. Using marketing paraphernalia, manufacturers fused the version of television as technical marvel into a desirable commodity. The fact that manufacturers were keen to emphasise to consumers the scientific nature of their receivers, and the large amount of research that went into developing them, implies that they believed that this was going to be of importance to the consumer.

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<sup>22</sup> “From research to production,” G.E.C., advertisement, *Radio Times* (October 23, 1936), 3.

<sup>23</sup> “Television,” His Master’s Voice, advertisement, *Radio Times* (October 23, 1936), 23.

<sup>24</sup> There are several more examples of 1930s television brochures in the National Science and Media Museum collection.

Furthermore, it suggests receiver design was not the only way in which manufacturers were trying to make their wares attractive to consumers at this stage in television's history.

These marketing strategies became part of how manufacturing companies developed their brand identities in a bid to convince consumers that their receivers were superior to the others on the market. Many of the television manufacturers were established in the electronics industries, several of which manufactured home media, notably radio and gramophones, and thus they sought to build on their existing reputation. H.M.V. for example was renowned for their work in sound recording, while Cambridge-based company Pye Ltd had been developing radio and valve equipment since the 1920s. A brochure for H.M.V. television receivers told its readers: 'in the vast field of home entertainment, one name has always been outstanding.'<sup>25</sup> A brochure for Dutch manufacturer Philips from 1949 tells its reader that 'Philips television carries with it all the prestige of Philips, the Dependable Radio.'<sup>26</sup> By developing a specific brand identity, manufacturers offered consumers with a means to identify with the ethos of the company and thus buy into the quality that the company offered. In addition to this, the fact that television was being produced by companies that were *already* associated with domestic media, such as radio, helped to position television as a domestic technology.

#### CHOICE AND DISTINCTION IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD

Television manufacturers capitalised upon the notion of distinction in how television was presented as a consumer good from the 1930s onwards, using promotional material to appeal to a discerning and wealthy consumer. Before 1950, this narrow appeal was inescapable as so few consumers could actually receive or afford television. By the mid-1950s, when television was more commonplace, promotional material continued to situate television as an exclusive commodity, however, as the choice of receivers grew, television sets were positioned in more

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<sup>25</sup> H.M.V. brochure (1939). National Science and Media Museum library, Bradford.

<sup>26</sup> Philips brochure (1949). National Science and Media Museum library, Bradford.

varied ways as a consumer good, with the arrival of colour television in 1967 further diffusing the market. Changes in technology allowed manufacturers to produce a greater range of sets, in new materials, shapes, sizes, and colours. The wider choice was presented to consumers as a means to demonstrate their own individuality by selecting wisely from the assortment of sets on offer. The concept of distinction was a key marketing strategy used in how television was positioned as it became more prevalent as a consumer good. Television's relationship to consumer culture had altered since 1955, inasmuch as the launch of commercial television made *explicit* television's connection to consumer culture, breaking the BBC's monopoly on the service. As Turnock highlights, many felt that the insertion of consumerist ideals into the British television service 'marked an apparent shift towards a more fragmented and individualized society.'<sup>27</sup> While there is no evidence that the arrival of ITV increased television set sales, it is representative of the changing landscape of consumer culture that shaped the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s. Tim Putnam suggests that marketers paid more attention to 'lifestyles' and the ways in which it was possible to 'insinuate goods into imagined ways of life.'<sup>28</sup> This is a trend we can see reflected in the advertisements for television sets; as choice increased, a television set's relationship to an individual's taste and 'lifestyle' became tantamount in how television was positioned as a consumer good.

Television sets were still framed as luxury items in the 1950s. Dynatron continued to use this model for their products; an advertisement from 1957 ran with the slogan 'for the discriminating' and described their sets as the 'connoisseur's choice.'<sup>29</sup> An advertisement for R.G.D. from 1950, from *Good Housekeeping*, featured a television receiver besides a candelabra, top hat, cane and gloves (see Figure 3.3). It includes the tag-line 'the aristocrat of

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<sup>27</sup> Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture*, 50.

<sup>28</sup> Tim Putnam, "Introduction: Design, Consumption and Domestic Ideals," in *Household Choices*, eds. Tim Putnam and Charles Newton (London: Futures Publications, 1990), 15.

<sup>29</sup> "For the discriminating," Dynatron, advertisement, *Ideal Home* (December 1957), 11.

radio and television,' which is referenced in the symbols of upper-class life listed above. The advert tells readers that 'the connoisseur will delight in the high-quality performance and beautiful appearance of these exclusive instruments.'<sup>30</sup> A later advertisement for R.G.D. used Lady Isobel Barnett, a popular television presenter, to advertise their receivers in 1955. Dressed in a ball gown and pictured next to a console model receiver, Lady Barnett is quoted saying 'there is deep and lasting enchantment to be found in beautiful things.'<sup>31</sup> The same tag-line as the earlier example was used, this time alluding to the aristocratic status of Lady Barnett, which is then conferred onto the television receiver. Lady Barnett's actual upper-class credentials are used in the advert to legitimise the claim that these receivers are superior. In analysis of how television content is legitimised, Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine have argued that 'legitimation works in part by aligning television with that which has already been legitimated and aestheticized.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "The aristocrat of radio and television," R.G.D., advertisement, *Good Housekeeping* (October 1950), 23.

<sup>31</sup> "The aristocrat of radio and television," R.G.D., advertisement, *Ideal Home* (January 1955), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine, *Legitimizing Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 5.



Figure 3.3: R.G.D. advertisement, *Good Housekeeping*, October 1950

In the immediate post-war period, however, opposing promotional narratives were able to co-exist. A modernist aesthetic, associated with minimalism and functionalism, came to the fore, eventually becoming the dominant, legitimate aesthetic. Sitting in opposition to the opulence associated with upper-class living, which the above examples capitalised upon, this new style rejected Victorian design in favour of the streamlined. The new design style was championed

by the CoID, who, we shall see shortly, weighed in heavily to the debate about television design. Some television manufacturers exploited the trend for modernist design approved by the CoID and hired furniture designers to design their television cabinets in the contemporary vernacular. In this way, these manufacturers deliberately positioned their sets as desirable to those embracing the contemporary look in their homes, offering an alternative form of legitimation. As Newman and Levine further argue about television content:

Legitimation is deeply invested in discourses of progress and improvement, and it works by the elevation of one concept of television at the expense of another. For some kinds of television to be consecrated as art, other kinds must be confirmed in inadequacy. New is elevated over passive, class over mass, masculine over feminine.<sup>33</sup>

The emergence of a modern, designer television set arguably fits this model, with the older, traditional style of sets rejected in favour of a superior, contemporary alternative. Television's legitimacy, therefore, does not only concern what is shown on television but also the receiver that shows it.

An example of a 'modernist' set was the Pye contemporary TV model released in 1957. This model was designed by well-known furniture designer Robin Day, whose work had been on display at the Festival of Britain. Robin Day's room designs at the Festival included television sets and were designed to meet a modernist criterion.<sup>34</sup> By association, therefore, Day's reputation as a designer would have conferred panache onto the set, elevating it from being an 'ordinary' set, into a designer good. It won the CoID design of the year award in 1957, which stated that 'the well organised appearance of this set is evidently the result of co-operation

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<sup>33</sup> Newman and Levine, *Legitimizing Television*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 4.

between the designer and the firm's technical staff.'<sup>35</sup> This award was another stamp of legitimacy for the set and another way that it was positioned as a designer good. The set was marketed as a contemporary television receiver and advertisements ran with tag lines including 'designed to take their place happily in the home of today...' and 'Pye TV for the contemporary home.' The adverts emphasised that the sets were designer, using quotes from Robin Day explaining his design rationale. One advert read: 'no attempt has been made to disguise or elaborate these sets, but instead we have tried to express their real character – that of fine electronic instruments.'<sup>36</sup> The adverts show images of the Pye receiver in homes furnished with contemporary furnishings, illustrating what they mean by the contemporary home (see Figure 3.4). Pye's receiver was situated within a contemporary design vernacular, which materialised in the immediate post-war period and was imbued with specific connotations. Pye used the design of the set to target a certain kind of consumer, who was interested in having both a well-designed home and a set to go with it. The design of the set was made to fit in with a constructed ideal of how domesticity should look, which was shifting rapidly in the post war period, and will be the focus of the next chapter.

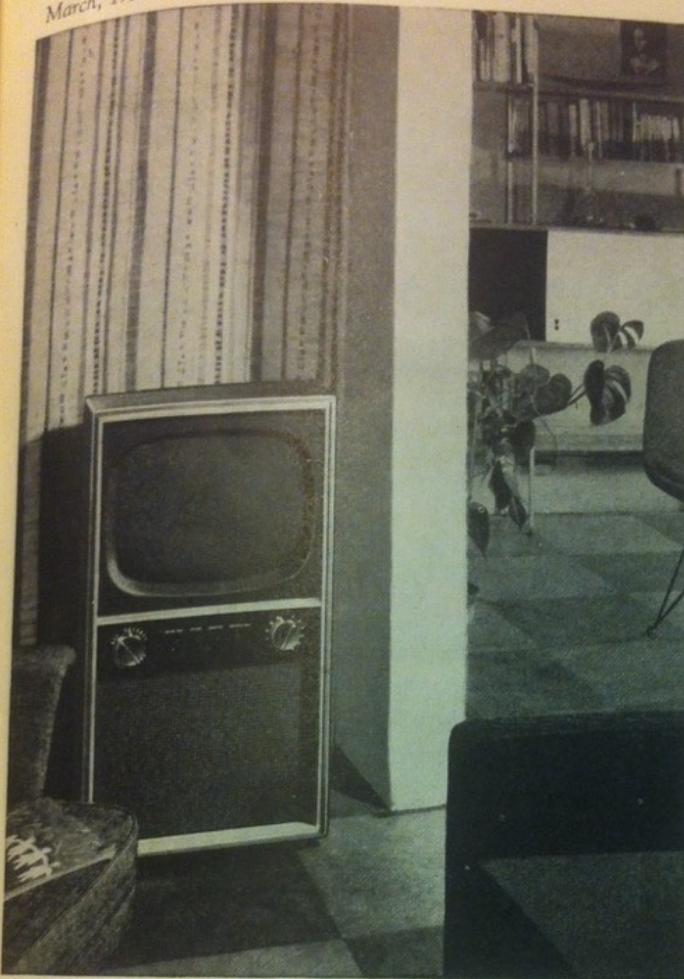
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<sup>35</sup> *Designs of the Year*, Council of Industrial Design publication (1958), 38. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton. 1646/5.

<sup>36</sup> "Designed to take their place happily in the home of today," Pye, advertisement, *Ideal Home* (March 1957), 5.

March, 1957

Ideal Home



Designed  
to take their  
place happily  
in the home  
of today...

With simple, unassertive cabinet work and clean, unfussy lines, Pye Contemporary TV has been specially created to harmonise with the new trend in good furniture design. Robin Day writes: "No attempt has been made to disguise or elaborate these sets, but instead we have tried to express their real character—that of fine electronic instruments."

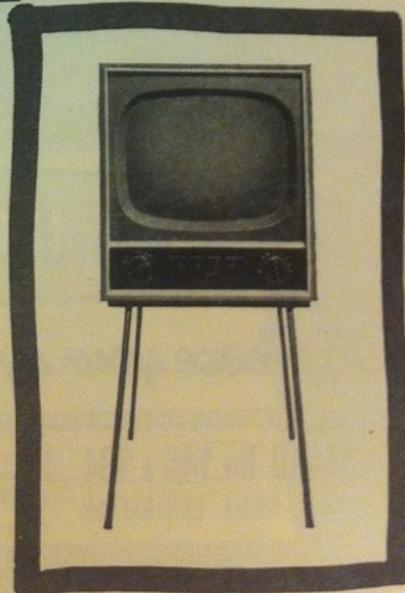
*Cabinets by Robin Day, A.R.C.A., F.S.I.A.*

*Pye Contemporary TV is elegantly presented in either Japanese Sen or French Walnut veneers, and features 13-Channel Tuning, A.P.C. and 17" Black Screen. Consoles: 87 gns. tax paid. Table models: 79 gns. tax paid. (Stand: 2 gns. extra.)*



**Contemporary TV**  
graces the Modern Home

PYE LIMITED OF CAMBRIDGE



5

Figure 3.4: Pye advertisement, *Ideal Home*, March 1957

Another highly praised television receiver range was the ‘Bermuda’ Ultra collection designed by Eric Marshall in the early 1960s. Marshall’s sets were praised by the CoID for their utilisation of the ‘instrument approach’ (see below) and were credited with reviving the fortunes of the company after a floundering performance.<sup>37</sup> The early 1960s was a challenging time for television manufacturers as the market began to contract and overproduction had led to large amounts of unsold stock. According to *Design*, it was Ultra’s decision to embrace the modernist design principles for their receivers which meant they were the only television manufacture to increase their market share in 1960.<sup>38</sup> This suggests that, by the early 1960s, consumers were becoming more attracted to the modern, designer television sets offered by manufacturers like Pye and Ultra (we shall see shortly that this was not always the case).

The CoID did not only have opinions about these two examples. In its capacity as a promoter of design, it had a strong voice in the debates about television design, offering critiques of how television had developed as a designed object and how it might potentially fit in with the home. This helped to position television sets as designed consumer goods, that were either well-designed or badly designed, adding another dimension to how television sets were constructed as commodities. The advice that the CoID offered was coloured by their belief in the utility and modernist principles of design, which favoured simplicity and functionality over ornament. The modernist message was disseminated via print media in the form of design publications and lifestyle magazines, exhibitions such as Britain Can Make It and the Festival of Britain, as well as in television programmes focusing on design. Much of the advice centred on rejecting an ‘ornamental’ style, associated with the Victorian home, which was considered to be overly ‘chintzy’ and cluttered. In 1946, the CoID commissioned a Penguin book series entitled *Things*

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<sup>37</sup> G.E. Moggridge, “Television and radio receivers,” *Design* 146 (February 1961), 26. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

*We See*, which aimed to educate readers in the basic principles of design. In the first of the series, *Indoors and Out*, author Alan Jarvis compared good design to a healthy diet:

We know the childish impulse to gorge on sweets and we recognise at once a visual example of the same thing: a mature taste in either food or furnishing would be made sick by too much sweetness. The other mark of a mature taste is the capacity to discriminate among simple things.<sup>39</sup>

Judy Attfield has commented on this literal interpretation of taste, whereby the sweet taste of children, associated with gorging, is mapped onto the more elaborate design tastes, favoured by women and the working classes.<sup>40</sup> This attitude towards design was shown in the reviews of television receiver designs offered in the CoID's monthly publication *Design*. Frequently, the more elaborate cabinet designs on offer were derided as 'bad' design, while the simplistic, streamlined cabinets were celebrated. A review of the Radio Show in 1960 lamented:

From a design point of view the industry is standing still and shows little sign of budging. The Germanic black and brass influence which overran the country like an ugly rash two or three years ago has largely vanished. Nostalgic leaps into the past with Queen Anne TV's and Jacobean radiograms were almost entirely absent. So far so good. What has taken their place? Nothing as far as we could see. The show was dominated by the dull, the nondescript and the pseudo-contemporary. Splayed legs were in abundance. Highly polished veneers were as ubiquitous as ever.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Alan Jarvis, *The Things We See: Indoors and Out* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1946), 29-30.

<sup>40</sup> Judy Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home: Writings on Popular Design and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 39.

<sup>41</sup> Anon, "Pointers...but which way at this year's Radio Show," *Design* 143 (November 1960), 25. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton.

The tension, for the CoID, lay in whether television should be considered an instrument or a piece of furniture. For advocates of modernist design principles, hiding television equipment in a cabinet was considered to be ‘dishonest,’ because it attempted to disguise the true ‘self’ of the object-technology. In an edition of *Design* magazine from 1962, the two approaches to designing television were laid out, with the viewpoint that the ‘television set is essentially a refined electronic instrument and as such should not be disguised as something else’ clearly favoured.<sup>42</sup> The abiding principle of the modernist designers was that allowing the object to be true to its form would automatically make it attractive: form follows function. An article in 1962 from *Ideal Home* was similarly dismayed at the state of television design:

A few years ago, television was undoubtedly a status symbol and manufacturers could lavish their cabinets with reflecting plasticised veneers, simulated gold trim and the subtle glitter of metallic threads with impunity. But now [...] ownership can be no more impressive than having one’s house wired for electricity. Perhaps this loss of status symbolism will encourage the industry to treat design with the same common sense as, say, the refrigerator industry, with an interior that is practical and an exterior that is functional and unobtrusive.<sup>43</sup>

This implied a correlation between television’s position as a status symbol and bad design, which construed a negative projection onto those consuming television as a status symbol, who are figured as being like the children gorging on the sweets from the earlier example. The discussion around television sets was in many ways reminiscent of how different cultural texts have been placed into cultural hierarchies, which make a distinction between vulgar, popular tastes and those that are more elite and refined. This speaks to Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of

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<sup>42</sup> Peter E.M. Sharp, “Survey of Industry,” *Design* 157 (January 1962), 36 and 42. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton.

<sup>43</sup> Denny Barton, “At Home with Television,” *Ideal Home* (September 1962), 79.

taste, in which he assesses that ‘art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences.’<sup>44</sup>

The design and manufacture of television sets, however, was beholden to the economic realities dictating the decisions made by manufacturers, for which the aesthetic of the set was only a partial consideration. This is brought to the fore in the letters page of *Design* magazine from November 1952, where a letter reveals the manufacturer’s perspective on cabinet design. B.J. Benzimra, managing director of Felgate Radio Ltd, wrote in to respond to an article on cabinet design from an earlier issue and explains that ‘we will continue to manufacture what the public wants and we will determine this by listening to our dealers. We dare do nothing else.’ The letter explained that adding doors to a set was expensive and only ended up adding more cost to the customer, it also stated that ‘doors represent a confession that a television set when not working is basically ugly and is best hidden.’<sup>45</sup> The expense of the set was the main drawback for many consumers considering a television set, so the need to reduce the cost was likely a key consideration for manufacturers. This letter exchange reveals tension between the didactic message of ‘good’ design offered by the CoID and other mainstream design publications and the kind of design that consumers actually wanted. The manufacturers’ comment points to the fact that consumers did not want avant-garde design for their television sets, instead favouring the designs which were dismissed by the CoID. The active choice of consumers to rebel against prescriptive models of taste was a common occurrence within the development of modernism more broadly. Judy Attfield and Daniel Miller, in their respective work on new estates in Harlow, Essex and on council estates, have demonstrated how it was common for inhabitants of these spaces to defy the architects and designers who planned the use of the space, through

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<sup>44</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated from the French by Richard Nice (London and New York: Routledge, 2003[1983]), xxx.

<sup>45</sup> B.J. Benzimra, “TV Cabinets Criticised,” Letter, *Design* 47 (November 1952), 25. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton.

their own consumer decisions and the display of objects deemed to be lacking in taste.<sup>46</sup> Attfield argues that it was these kinds of consumer decisions which brought ‘modernity home,’ rather than solely through the designers and architects imposing their idea of contemporary living.<sup>47</sup> In *Design* magazine there are several references to consumer’s preferences for the ‘bad’ designs of television receivers, which suggests that in the instance of television design, consumers were defying the didactic advice offered. However, alongside this, consumers were also offered a means of aligning themselves with ‘good’ taste; by possessing a set, which was approved by the CoID, a consumer could show their investment in modernist principles and display their design acumen.

The implicit suggestions about television sets and taste became more explicit in later advertisements for other television sets. In 1961, an advertisement for McMichael, which appeared in *Ideal Home* magazine, made overt the link between television consumption and good taste (see Figure 3.5).<sup>48</sup> The advertisement ran with two tags lines: ‘move on up with McMichael’ and ‘made for critical people’; the former suggesting the brand could elevate the consumer, with the latter praising the judgement and taste of those that choose their receivers. The advertisement does not only emphasise the quality of the set, but also the quality of the consumer. It features a young, stylish couple sitting amongst McMichael receivers, insinuating that they are an example of the critical consumer who would be attracted to the television sets on display, inviting the potential consumer to identify with the couple and their lifestyle. This example from the early 1960s is markedly different from the early advertisements from the 1950s; the use of aristocratic tropes, which were discussed earlier, have been replaced by a contemporary, middle class aesthetic associated with taste, design and critical judgement.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*; Daniel Miller, “Appropriating the State on the Council Estate,” *Man: New Series* 23, No.2 (June 1988): 353-372.

<sup>47</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*, 10.

<sup>48</sup> “Made for critical people,” McMichael, advertisement, *Ideal Home* (October 1961), 197.

<sup>49</sup> The shift away from aristocratic conventions was happening on-screen as well. It was common in the early 1950s for presenters to actually be aristocrats, such as Lady Isobel Barnett (who featured in

**Made for critical people**

You will not find McMichael television and radio in every type of home. McMichael cater frankly for people of above-average taste (but not above average income) . . . people who can detect a better quality of picture and sound . . . people who appreciate cabinets that are not timidly conventional but excitingly, subtly *right*. See how McMichael use the remarkable new 'Fine Line' veneer. Notice the cinema close-up quality of TV picture. Listen to the stereograms and transistor radios. If you're critical, you'll want McMichael.

**YOUR GUIDE TO THE McMICHAEL RANGE**

1, 19" 'Fine Line' TV & VHF 66 gns. 2, 19" TV 63 gns. 3, 17" Portable—choice of four colours 55 gns. 4, 23" Console 85 gns. 5, 19" Console 73 gns. 6, Stereogram 73 gns. 7, 'Luxury Consort' Transistor Radio 17 gns. 8, 'Personal' Transistor Radio 12½ gns. 9, 'Gadabout' Transistor Radio 15 gns. 10, Combined 19" TV, Gram and VHF Radio 96 gns. 11, 19" 'Fine Line' TV 61 gns. 12, 23" 'Fine Line' TV 72 gns.

To: McMichael Radio Ltd., Dept. H.G., Langley Park, Slough, Bucks. Please send me your illustrated booklet on McMichael sets.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Move up with **McMichael**

Figure 3.5: McMichael advertisement, *Ideal Home*, October 1961

the R.G.D. advertisement), and to be dressed in formal attire, speaking in RP accents, but by the early 1960s, the BBC and ITV were diversifying, both offering television programmes, which had regional settings and showed working class life.

The connection between television receivers and taste in how television sets were marketed persisted in the promotional material for colour television, which was launched in 1967. Manufacturers had the task of persuading consumers to buy a completely new set, at a time when the majority of householders already had one. The arrival of colour television led to the launch of several new advertising campaigns from leading television manufacturers, in which the concept of the individual and their lifestyle became even more pronounced. In 1969, Bang and Olufsen offered a set ‘for those who consider design and quality before price.’<sup>50</sup> A later advert in 1971 stated that their sets were ‘strictly for the sophisticated’ and that they offered ‘television to exemplify your good taste.’<sup>51</sup> The subtlety was diminished even further in an advertisement from the same year, which stated simply that ‘our products are made for people who like to own better things and Beovision colour is simply the best you can buy.’<sup>52</sup> Murphy offered a more playful approach with a similar message, positioning themselves as the television manufacturer for those interested in culture and design, rather than what’s on television. One advertisement from 1975 ran with the tag line ‘smart people don’t watch television, this is what they don’t watch it on.’<sup>53</sup> From the same year, an advertisement for Sony Trinitron featured an image of an open window and an empty television stand with the caption ‘obviously that burglar has something besides my TV. Taste.’<sup>54</sup>

In many ways, these advertisements for colour television sets re-worked the ideas presented in the promotional material for early television receivers; the consumer was still being offered a means to buy into the ethos of the manufacturer and distinguish their good taste in their

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<sup>50</sup> “Bang and Olufsen – for those who consider design and quality before price,” Bang and Olufsen, advertisement, *Homes and Gardens* (December 1969), 3.

<sup>51</sup> “Strictly for the sophisticated,” Bang and Olufsen, advertisement, *Homes and Gardens* (October 1971), 178-179.

<sup>52</sup> “Beautiful Bang and Olufsen,” Bang and Olufsen, advertisement, *Homes and Gardens* (November 1971), 5.

<sup>53</sup> “Smart people don’t want television, this is what they don’t watch it on,” Murphy, advertisement, *Good Housekeeping* (May 1975), 8-9.

<sup>54</sup> “The last time I lost a clear, sharp picture on my Sony Trinitron was when it was stolen,” Sony, advertisement, *Good Housekeeping* (July 1975), 6.

consumption decision. Colour television sets, much like early sets, were expensive and therefore out of reach for many households. The adverts re-positioned television as a status symbol for the affluent middle classes, for whom owning a new, colour television could act as a means of showing off their wealth. However, there is less emphasis on the technological quality of the sets and more put on how the television sets function as part of a household's or person's lifestyle. These advertisements for colour television make a heavy-handed point of demonstrating that the particular sets are tasteful, and that the consumer can rest assured that owning the set will reflect well on them. The explicit need to highlight this speaks to the implicit anxieties that had become attached to television consumption as it transformed into a mass consumed object-technology transmitting mass culture into the home. It is apparent that the anxieties around television design, which manifested in design publications and lifestyle magazines, were appropriated by the television manufacturers, who then used taste, design and lifestyle as one of the main methods for positioning television as a commodity as choice became more varied.

## WOMEN AND THE CONSUMPTION OF TELEVISION



Figure 3.6: Baird Television stand at Radiolympia, c. 1930s, *Daily Herald* collection, National Science and Media Museum

Television's construction as a domestic consumer good meant that women were instrumental in its acceptance as a medium; in their figurative role as guardians of the home, women were seen to be fundamental to changes shaping the domestic sphere. Helen Wheatley has stated that 'persuading women of the absolute necessity of television was central to the development of take-up of the medium in the mid-twentieth century.'<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the positioning of the television set as a consumer good was also gendered; women played a particular role in how television was constructed as a consumer good, either as the target of the promotional material or as a means to sell sets. This construction began with how early receivers were marketed in the 1930s. In a wide variety of photographs from the *Daily Herald* image archive, women are featured alongside television receivers. These range from photographs of female factory workers constructing sets to female models in knickerbockers showing off cathode ray tubes.<sup>56</sup> Promotional images from exhibitions, like Radiolympia, featured well-dressed women watching television sets (see Figure 3.6). Television sets were framed as an accessory for women, at the same time as women were used as an accessory for selling sets.

This seemingly passive presentation of women in relation to television sets is complicated by the fact that women were employed in their thousands in television and radio factories from the 1930s onwards (see Figure 3.7). The growing electronics industries provided working class women with unprecedented job opportunities in factories in this decade.<sup>57</sup> It is one of the ways in which the growth of television made a material and economic difference to the lives of women in Britain. A marketing leaflet for Dynatron receivers from c. 1938/9 makes reference to this female workforce; the brochure explains that Dynatron products are superior, because 'no girls are used on any operations.'<sup>58</sup> This small remark in the brochure reveals how little this

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<sup>55</sup> Wheatley, "Television in the Ideal Home," 205.

<sup>56</sup> *Daily Herald* archive, National Science and Media Museum, Bradford.

<sup>57</sup> Clare Wightman, *More than Munitions: Women, Work and the Engineering Industries, 1900-1950*, (London and New York: Longman, 1999), 23.

<sup>58</sup> Dynatron brochure (c. 1938/9). National Science and Media Museum library, Bradford.

work by women was valued and that their work was deemed to be inferior to a man's, so much so that a manufacturer felt they had to qualify that 'no girls' had made their sets. It suggests that the address of this particular brochure is towards a male consumer, even though contemporary reports cited women as the more enthusiastic consumers of television. At the 1938 Radiolympia, a General Electric Company salesman reported that the boom in television sales was down to female consumers:

During the Show some 50,000 people visited the G.E.C. television booth, and of this number we estimate that over 60% were women [...] it is unquestionably the feminine interest that has been very largely responsible for the boom.<sup>59</sup>

While the Dynatron brochure was only a small remark, it is again symptomatic of the way in which gender quickly became entwined with television consumption practices, with women's contribution to the development of television (and radio) consistently devalued. Yet, academics have shown how important women were to the take-up of television.<sup>60</sup> Spigel and Wheatley, in particular, have shown how television was constructed as a consumer good for women, in advertisements, magazines and at exhibitions like the Ideal Home Exhibition in the United States and Britain.<sup>61</sup> The often-problematic coalescence of television consumption and the female consumer, which has been frequently discussed in relation to the 1950s, materialised in the 1930s, as television's identity was formed into a consumer good.

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<sup>59</sup> Anon, "Women and Television," *Practical and Amateur Wireless and Practical Television* (17 September 1938), 7.

<sup>60</sup> See Chapter 1: Literature Review.

<sup>61</sup> Spigel, *Make Room for TV*; Wheatley, "Television in the Ideal Home."



Figure 3.7: Factory worker fitting a Cathode Ray Tube, 5 November 1936, *Daily Herald* collection, National Science and Media Museum

Television continued to be marketed in a gendered way in the post-war period. As different models of television sets were released, women were often targeted directly as consumers. The portable television set, for example, was presented as a desirable choice for women. Deborah Chambers has argued that the introduction of the portable television receiver in 1956 precipitated a shift away from family centred viewing towards a more individualised conceptualisation of viewing.<sup>62</sup> Though statistics suggest that the reality was that most households continued to view in groups – even by 1975 only 6% of homes had a second television set<sup>63</sup> – there was a drive within television advertisements to associate the portable television sets with the individual and their lifestyle. While Chambers shows how the arrival of the portable television in Britain marked a change towards a more personalised, fragmented

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<sup>62</sup> Chambers, “The Material Culture of the Television Set,” 369.

<sup>63</sup> Joe Moran, *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History of Britain in Front of the TV* (London: Profile Books, 2013), 198.

construction of viewing, there is little attention paid to the fact that the promotion of the portable television was gendered in significant ways.



Figure 3.8: First portable television, made by Ecko, at Radiolympia, 1956, *Daily Herald* collection, National Science and Media Museum

Promotional photographs for portable television receivers often featured young, glamorous women carrying television sets as if they were handbags. For example, a photograph from Radiolympia in 1956 shows a young woman holding the Ecko portable set, which was the first portable television to go on sale (see Figure 3.8). The association of television sets with feminine glamour was utilised in an advert for the McMichael portable from 1961, which depicts women in various dresses alongside different McMichael portable sets. The text explains that the sets are designed to match the women's prettiest dresses, positioning the televisions as an accessory to the woman's style (see Figure 3.9).<sup>64</sup> The kinds of colours on offer are 'feminine,' including 'a subtle Dove Grey' and 'a glorious Primrose yellow.' The women are posed besides the sets or, in one picture, the woman holds it like a handbag. The lightness of the sets is stressed; the set is portable enough to be carried from room to room. Thus, the set offers the woman a chance to travel between rooms in her home, fitting around her domestic life.

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<sup>64</sup> "Happy-go-portables," McMichael, advertisement, *Ideal Home* (May 1961), 186.

# McMichael *Gaiety*\*

## Happy-go-portables

Colour-keyed to contemporary homes

Everly designed to match the mood of modern homes—or your prettiest dress—are the new colour-keyed McMichael portables. What joy to get away from the 'dark ages' of ordinary TV sets! Only McMichael could give you such a stylish choice of Interior Decorator's colours: a gay Coral Pink, a subtle Dove Grey, a glorious Primrose Yellow and a beautiful Lake Green.



▼ Primrose Yellow ▲ Lake Green



▲ Coral Pink ▼ Dove Grey



McMichael 'Gaiety' are slimmest ever portables, *less than 12" deep*. You can carry them easily from room to room, fit them in anywhere. They give you a crystal clear 17" picture, finger tip control. And all that marvellous night-after-night performance you expect from McMichael. They're unbeatable value for money so . . .

Add 'Gaiety' to your home — only **55** CENS

Figure 3.9: Advertisement for McMichael, *Ideal Home*, May 1961

The 'slender seventeener' by Philco was marketed at teenage girls. The advert which featured in *Ideal Home* in 1958 featured a teenage girl embracing a television set, with her parents watching on approvingly in the background (see Figure 3.10).<sup>65</sup> The text explains that it will be the 'height of television fashion years from now.' The slender body of the television set is praised, while the name of the receiver implies that it is meant to be associated with the slim frame of the teenage girl pictured. Philco were evidently attempting to tap into the emerging teenage market, a consumer group that was beginning to wield increasing power in the late 1950s. This depiction of the portable television set again makes it akin to a fashion accessory, rather than a technical instrument or a piece of furniture, which marks a new articulation for how the television set was constructed as a consumer good.

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<sup>65</sup> "The slender seventeener," Philco, advertisement, *Ideal Home* (November 1958), 98.



Figure 3.10: Section from an advertisement for Philco, *Ideal Home*, November 1961

The concept that women chose sets based on their appearance and men chose based on technical ability had been used in advertising since the introduction of radio. Indeed, Shaun Moores argues that the radio underwent a physical transformation in the 1930s in order to appeal to women and help it gain acceptance in the family home.<sup>66</sup> A Sobell radio advert from 1948 stated that ‘you know what women are – they *will* judge radio on appearances.’<sup>67</sup> An advert for a Philco television set from 1958 plays on this gendered notion but instead focuses

<sup>66</sup> Moores, “The Box on the Dresser,” 31-33.

<sup>67</sup> “Confidential – for men only!,” Sobell, advertisement, *Homes and Gardens* (June 1948), 12.

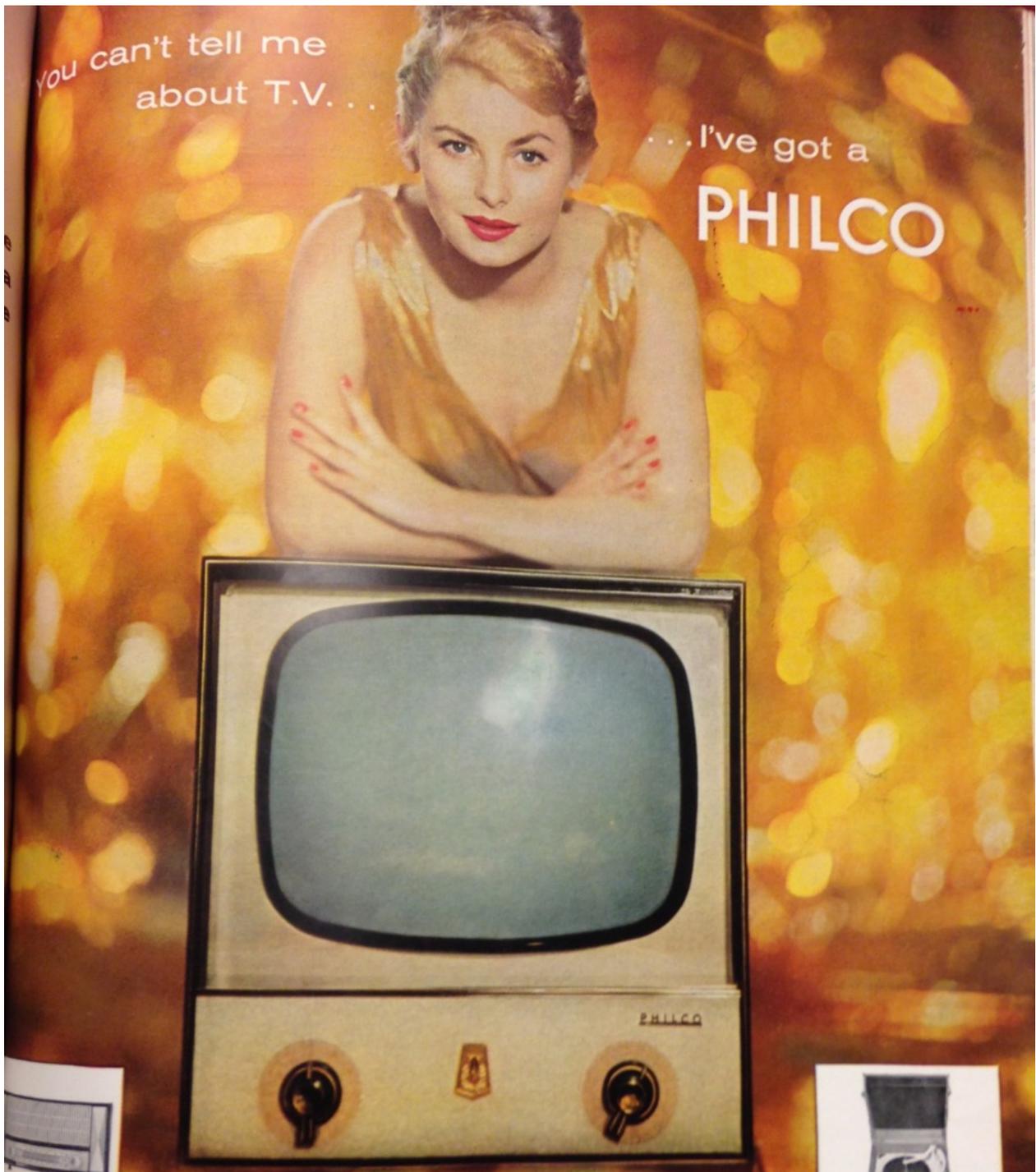
on how the woman's consumer decision to purchase a Philco becomes a form of empowerment (see Figure 3.11). The advert features a woman leaning on a television set with the caption 'you can't tell me about TV ... I've got a Philco' and 'she knows best because she's got the best.'<sup>68</sup> It implies that she has been told before that she does not know about television but that the purchase of this set has now demonstrated her ability, thus silencing her critics. As we have already seen, the female consumer was instrumental to the widespread take up of television, often in her capacity as homemaker. The release of the portable television created a new role for the female consumer; the portable was depicted as an individual accessory, one which expressed her identity and lifestyle through its connection to her fashion sense, as well as one which demonstrated her prowess as a consumer in her choice of the right set.

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<sup>68</sup> "You can't tell me about TV," Philco, advertisement, *Ideal Home* (May 1958), 141.

You can't tell me about T.V. . . .

. . . I've got a **PHILCO**



PHILCO

PHILCO RADIO-3710  
built-in aerial. Extra-  
sensitive and selective.  
Non-cabinet, modern  
speaker grille. Only  
19s. tax paid.

She knows best because she's got the best . . . in TV quality *and* value. It's the Philco 1962 all-station TV with oversize 17" screen . . . brilliant metropolitan performance . . . front-facing speaker . . . contemporary dark walnut cabinet. Price? Just 65 gns. tax paid. You can't tell Philco about TV value, either! Ask your Philco dealer: write for his address. Then see the full Philco range . . . soon!

PHILCO PARTYGRAM  
with 4-speed autochanger,  
powerful output. In easy-carry  
case. Only 19s. tax paid.

OK AHEAD  
*and you'll choose*

**PHILCO** PHILCO (GREAT BRITAIN) LIMITED  
30-32 Gray's Inn Road, London W.C.1.

f\*\* 141

Figure 3.11: Advertisement for Philco, *Ideal Home*, May 1958

There was a distinct positioning of television as a consumer good that was aimed specifically at women. However, the majority of these examples come from women's magazines, therefore, it was more likely that advertisements aimed at women would appear. The promotional images from the *Daily Herald* archive show that these constructions persisted beyond the magazines, making this one of the central ways in which television was constructed as a consumer good. There are examples of advertisements aimed at men: Radio Rentals advertisements for colour television from the late 1960s often showed a television screen depicting sporting events, a genre of television programming more traditionally associated with the male viewer.<sup>69</sup> An advert for a Sony portable television from *Homes and Gardens* in 1971 shows a man watching a portable television in the middle of a field next to his fishing gear (see Figure 3.12).<sup>70</sup> The tag line reads 'the one that got away,' using a fishing reference to make fun of the fact that the man is watching TV instead of fishing. It also implies that he has got away from the domestic sphere, into the outdoors, where he is able to engage in more masculine pursuits alone, such as watching sport and fishing. Unlike the examples featuring women, the male figure is offered space beyond the home through the portable television, while the women were only given the opportunity to travel *within* the home.

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<sup>69</sup> Selection of Radio Rentals advertisements from History of Advertising Trust, 1968-78. See David Morley, *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (London: Comedia, 1986).

<sup>70</sup> "The one that got away," Sony, advertisement, *Homes and Gardens* (June 1971), 37.



## the one that got away

You might catch a Sony 9" television plugged into a mains in the corner of a drawing room - but you'd be lucky. Our TV9 was designed for the great outdoors, where TV9s roam in their thousands. This unique set gives 405 and 625 line reception, can be carried easily with one hand ready to bring you BBC1, BBC2 and the independent stations. It doesn't have to be hooked at the end of a line - rechargeable batteries (optional extra) see to that. There's a

built-in aerial; neat, fold-away handle and a special anti-glare screen for sunshine viewing.

There's even an individual earpiece so that you can eavesdrop on 'A Family at War' without frightening the fish.

So for Disney or drama, 'Grandstand' or golf our TV9 brings you a world of entertainment - wherever you are.

Recommended retail price £83.50 from your Sony Dealer.

**SONY**  
RESEARCH MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

SONY (U.K.) LTD Pyrene House, Sunbury Cross, Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex Telephone: Sunbury-on-Thames 87644-7

Figure 3.12 Sony television advertisement, *Homes and Gardens*, June 1971

## PART 2: CONSUMING THE TELEVISION SET

Television began as a niche commodity, positioned as a luxury consumer good, only available to the wealthiest consumers. As it became more widespread across homes in Britain, it was still positioned as an exclusive commodity but in more varied ways. The previous section has argued that, through its design and marketing, television sets were promoted as a means for consumers to distinguish themselves and express their taste and identity, whatever that might be. It is also necessary to consider how consumers understood television as a consumer good; they had to find value in television if they were going to part with their money to acquire one.

### ‘DECISION ON TELEVISION’

Early promotional material for television sets positioned television as a luxury good, which was what it was for much of the population. Television remained a niche commodity in the 1930s in part because it cost too much for most households. Even in 1949, sets remained relatively expensive – a budget model cost £50, while the average industrial wage was under £7 a week<sup>71</sup> – and with the austerity of wartime Britain still biting, those that could afford to buy television sets outright would have been a minority.<sup>72</sup> The high cost, small screen size and varied quality of television were all reasons that contributed to the low sales of television receivers before the 1950s. Several responses to the 1949 MO directive refer to the cost of television as being a major reason why they would not invest in a set. A 27 year old housewife wrote ‘if I could afford it I should certainly like to have a set in the same way as I should certainly like to have a car, a private swimming pool and other good things of life!’<sup>73</sup> For this woman, television was a luxury item, akin to a swimming pool, and thus she imagines it was only obtainable for the very rich. Of the 308 respondents who commented on the present state

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<sup>71</sup> Corner, *Popular Television in Britain*, 3.

<sup>72</sup> Estimates from 1947 indicated that 48% of television sets in use were owned by the better-off 12% of the population, see Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol. 4*, 230.

<sup>73</sup> “M-O panel on television,” 3.

of television, 63% mentioned that television was too expensive. As another respondent wrote ‘so far as we are concerned (my family) the chief drawback is the cost.’<sup>74</sup>

Even in the 1950s, when austerity was easing off, consumers still had to make priorities about what they could purchase and how they should purchase it. Dennis Chapman’s sociological study from 1955 on social status offers a glimpse into which households were able to afford television in the 1950s. Chapman found a correlation between piano distribution and television distribution across homes of different social classes:

There is some reason to believe that, like the distribution of television sets, the distribution of pianos reflects the relatively greater weekly income available to tenants of council houses compared with the purchasers of semi-detached houses, both these items being bought on the hire-purchase system as a rule.<sup>75</sup>

Televisions were more common in council houses because they had a greater weekly income to spend on extras. Chapman also stated that ‘the absence of television in the detached house is regarded as a mild eccentricity.’<sup>76</sup> This helps to build a picture of how television was diffusing as a consumer good, with television being found in both the houses of the wealthiest and poorest households, but less frequently in the ones in-between. The 2003 MO directive is particularly revealing about where television sets sat on the list of priorities of householders in this period; several respondents explain that they chose to purchase domestic goods such as a radio, fridge, or twin tubs before a television. One female respondent wrote ‘my husband decided to buy a refrigerator first. He got his priorities right.’<sup>77</sup> While another female

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>75</sup> Dennis Chapman, *The Home and Social Status* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), 102-3.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>77</sup> H5280, “Images of the 1950s and 60s,” directive questionnaire (M-O Spring 2003). MO-A, University of Sussex, sxmoa2/1/69/1/1.

respondent remembers that her ‘husband could not live without T.V! We had to have that before I could have a washing machine!’<sup>78</sup> Economic realities frequently dictated the decision on television, at a time when there were several other household goods competing to make the home a more comfortable, efficient and entertaining place. Consumers understood television as one of only many consumers goods shaping the home. Both these respondents recall that the husband made the purchasing decisions for the home, so while these goods were frequently aimed at women in magazines and exhibitions these two responses suggest that the male figure made the final decision about what was purchased.

The shops where consumers purchased or rented the set would have been a key aspect of the experience of choosing what set to purchase, for which, unfortunately, there is little surviving evidence. A few responses to the 2003 MO directive recall that the set was purchased from a TV and radio store (which were often reported as being owned by a relative), or from a rental store. One woman recalls her experience of her father choosing a set in the early 1950s:

We lived on the outskirts of Stockport and several radio and TV firms competed to sell their wares. They were open in an evening for viewing and I remember frequent visits to Stockport after I had done my homework to look at sets. My father put in a lot of research to find the best buy.<sup>79</sup>

Here we have another example where the man of the household made the financial decision about what television to buy and where from. In 1957, *Design* magazine saw fault with where television consumers bought their TV; it lamented that ‘the majority of radio and television sets are distributed as electrical appliances.’ It stated that many consumers bought their TVs

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<sup>78</sup> H2639, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>79</sup> H2637, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

through a dealer system, where ‘they are buying a piece of furniture surrounded by razors, hair dryers, refrigerators, imitation coal fires, plastic wax dripping from plastic chandeliers, electric irons, torches and cycle lamps.’<sup>80</sup> An advertisement for Philips products from 1961 features a television set, a radio, an electric whisk and electric food maker, which suggests that, for a large electrical supplier such as Philips, television was only one of many utilitarian household goods they were trying to promote.<sup>81</sup> This advertising strategy offers a stark contrast to the advertisement from only six years earlier from R.G.D., in which television presenter Lady Isobel Barnett is dressed in a ball gown next to a television receiver, with the printed quotation ‘there is deep and lasting enchantment to be found in beautiful things.’<sup>82</sup>

The service offered by department stores did provide consumers with a more luxurious way to purchase television. Two photographs from the John Lewis Partnership show the shop floor of the flagship store in Oxford Street in 1939 and 1975 respectively (the earlier of which has already been discussed). The photograph from 1975 illustrates the sheer choice of sets that were available three decades later on the dedicated sound and vision shop floor (see Figure 3.13).<sup>83</sup> In the 1950s, John Lewis stores offered customers detailed brochures on how to choose a television set and provided installation and maintenance services to their customers. A promotional brochure from 1954 for the service at the Bon Marché branch in Brixton, London explains:

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<sup>80</sup> Jack Stafford, “A design policy needed for radio and TV cabinets,” *Design* 98 (February 1957), 17-23. Design Council Archives, University of Brighton.

<sup>81</sup> “Such wonderful products for your new home,” Philips, advertisement, *Good Housekeeping* (June 1961), 5.

<sup>82</sup> ‘The aristocrat of radio and television,’ R.G.D., advertisement, *Ideal Home* (January 1955), 1.

<sup>83</sup> John Lewis Radio and Television department, Oxford Street store, photograph (1977). John Lewis Partnership archive, Cookham, 2154/I (ii).

A television set is a much more complex instrument than a radio set [...] although manufacturers carry out extensive tests and inspections, there is more chance that something may go wrong [...] Regular servicing is therefore, most important.<sup>84</sup>

There appear to have been different shopping experiences for television; some were buying it in a general electrical store, at the same time as department stores offered tailored services to their television customers, while other customers rented.



Figure 3.13: John Lewis shop floor, 1975, John Lewis Partnership archive

The arrival of rental options from 1950 made television more affordable. Many respondents to the 2003 MO directive remember renting their first set, while others describe buying or receiving sets second-hand, with very few stating that they bought their first set outright or

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<sup>84</sup> Television maintenance brochure, Bon Marché (1954). John Lewis Partnership archive, Cookham, 2074/m.

with hire purchase. A female respondent, who was a child at the time, writes distinctly about the experience of her mother paying the rental fee for their television receiver:

The first set my parents had was rented. I can remember my mother going into the TV rental shop in London Road, Brighton, each week when she went shopping to pay for the weekly stamp on her rental card to prove she had paid the fee [...] I think the reason the set was rented was because the price of purchase was way beyond what was affordable; also, the added bonus was that rented sets were repaired free of charge should anything go wrong.<sup>85</sup>

Television rentals, therefore, was a means for householders to obtain a set, without making the large investment in purchasing one outright, which was a means to off-set some of the persistent worries about television receivers being faulty.<sup>86</sup> Responses to the 1949 MO directive show that for many respondents the quality of television receivers did not justify the expense of the set, with many expressing worries about the technology only being in the infancy. In the MO 1949 directive, the idea of something going ‘wrong’ was a fear that prevented people from investing in a set. One respondent stated: ‘television is very much in its infancy and I have no real desire to be in on its growing pains,’ while another wrote ‘I can’t afford to spend nearly £100 on an article which may be superseded, and I am content to wait and see which way the manufacturing cat will jump.’<sup>87</sup> The small screen of the television set was mentioned frequently, alongside concerns about the programming quality and the small number of broadcasting hours. These responses suggest that, for these potential consumers,

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<sup>85</sup> N2912, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>86</sup> There were two main rental firms in the UK – Radio Rentals Ltd and DER ‘Domestic Electric Rentals’ – who eventually merged, see Geddes, *The Setmakers*, 331-334.

<sup>87</sup> “M-O panel on television,” 5.

television was not *worth* investing in at that time; both the state of the service and the technology were not seen sufficient to justify the cost and risks involved in purchasing a set.

In both MO surveys there are several examples of respondents sharing or remembering the frustrations of the bad quality of television reception and the small screen sizes. One respondent from the 1949 directive wrote ‘the viewing screen is so small that viewers would have to be close to the set to see anything.’ One called the ‘small screen’ ridiculous, with another called it ‘this funny little screen.’<sup>88</sup> A sales manager wrote:

Have seen television in London and not particularly impressed, screens are far too small and objects too small to be other than identifiable. For instance I saw the state opening of Parliament and the stage coach appeared about the size of a match box and it might have been anyone sitting inside.<sup>89</sup>

Problems of interferences and flickering were also highlighted as annoyances while watching television. Several respondents to the 2003 MO directive describe the interference as being akin to the screen ‘snowing.’ For those who purchased sets second hand, respondents recall problems with the reliability of the set, but the owners had little choice but to use them. One woman remembers being unable to afford television until 1958, when they bought a second-hand model which was ‘somewhat temperamental.’<sup>90</sup> Another woman recalls the frustrations of using a second-hand set: ‘it wasn’t very good, we were always having to bang on the top or the side and repeatedly change the aerial position.’<sup>91</sup> As with early television receivers, the

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<sup>88</sup> 3418 and 3808, “Television,” directive questionnaire (M-O February 1949). M-OA, University of Sussex. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Mass Observation Online, <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/DirectiveQuestionnaire-1949feb> [Accessed July 03, 2017].

<sup>89</sup> 3858, “Television.”

<sup>90</sup> M1571, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>91</sup> N399, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

reported experiences of using a television set in the 1950s was somewhat different to the presentation in the promotional material. The positioning of television as a consumer good, therefore, was at odds with how consumers understood television; rather than being a luxury commodity, it was frequently understood as an unreliable, temperamental technology, that was not always worth its price tag.

However, an article from *Woman* magazine in 1950 offers a contrary example; we're told that the 'one thing that still fascinates Ruth about television – her family have been the proud possessors of a set for exactly a month – is the neatness of the pictures that come alive on that tiny screen.'<sup>92</sup> Similarly, an article in *Ideal Home* magazine from 1949, written by 'television and radio expert' Roy Norris, sees no problem with the screen size, stating that 'with the average smallish house [...] people generally agree that the size of picture given by 9- and 10-inch cathode ray tubes is adequate.'<sup>93</sup> Norris addresses the question of the state of television and its cost, referring to the 'cautious folk' who argue that 'we will wait until the design of sets has been perfected,' to whom Norris responds that 'certainly design has not been perfected – but never will it be! – but television sets are not the crude first efforts in a new science.'<sup>94</sup> He goes on to say that while 'television sets are complicated instruments,' the purchase of insurance should prevent any anxiety on this score. It would seem, however, that the majority of consumers chose to rent rather than commit to buying and taking out insurance; as already discussed, several respondents to the MO directive in 2003 remember choosing to rent instead of buying. Yet, the *Ideal Home* article does not mention the rental market and instead advises on choosing the right set for any budget, describing the H.M.V. table model as 'outstanding value.'<sup>95</sup> Norris explains that table models are not only cheapest but can easily be moved, while

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<sup>92</sup> Anon, "Here and There," *Woman* (January 28, 1950), 3.

<sup>93</sup> Roy Norris, "Decision on Television," *Ideal Home* (May, 1949), 28.

<sup>94</sup> Norris, "Decision on Television," 29.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

the console models are more expensive, but more handsome, with larger screens. The article speaks to a reader who is assumed to have the money to buy and insure a set, while the reality was that most potential television consumers could not afford to buy a set outright or chose not to because it was not viewed as a good investment.

In the 1950s, the quality of the picture and the screen were frequently mentioned in promotional material for sets, indicating that manufacturers were responding to demands for better quality screens and reception. A brochure for Masteradio from c. 1950 stated:

Out in front you see the large size 12 inch screen become excitingly “alive” bringing news and entertainment as it happens in clear steady pictures [...] behind the screen are concealed the latest developments in television engineering, embodying many recent improvements in valve circuit technique. This ensures crisp brilliant pictures.<sup>96</sup>

An R.G.D. advertisement from 1950 asks ‘what do you look for in a television receiver,’ to which ‘large clear pictures’ is given as one of the answers.<sup>97</sup> An advertisement for an Ambassador television from 1951 stated that ‘nowhere will you find anything to compare either in picture quality, cabinet style or price.’<sup>98</sup> Some manufacturers created large screen television receivers to meet the demand for larger screens; an English Electric advertisement for their big screen television model from 1952 explains ‘no matter where you look, you will not find a better television picture than the one obtained from the ‘ENGLISH ELECTRIC’ 1651.’<sup>99</sup> In

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<sup>96</sup> Masteradio pamphlet (c. 1950). National Science and Media Museum library, Bradford.

<sup>97</sup> “Women’s point of view on television,” R.G.D., advertisement, *Woman’s Journal* (February 1950), 103.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Clearly unsurpassed,’ Ambassador, advertisement, *Ideal Home* (October 1951), 15.

<sup>99</sup> “May we say this,” English Electric, advertisement, *Homes and Gardens* (July 1952), 99.

1953, Valradio advertised their television projectors, which offered a screen size of 34 inches by 25.5 inches, using a projection method.<sup>100</sup>

Indeed, by the mid-1950s many of television's 'growing pains' had been resolved. Sets came down in price, screen size increased, the geographical reach of the television service broadened, broadcasting hours lengthened and, in 1955, another channel was introduced, extending viewing choice. Such developments in the technological and broadcasting quality of television will have accounted, to some extent, for the rising number of sound and vision licenses in the 1950s. Responses to the MO 1949 directive and the MO 2003 directive reveal that, for many consumers, during the period of television's 'growing pains,' a receiver was too expensive and not worth the technical growing pains that many had encountered, exposing a disjuncture between the highly mediated version of early television as a technical marvel and the challenges television faced in its early stages. By examining how consumers understood the television set as a consumer good, it is evident that the experience was not uniform; consumers had to prioritise television according to their own economic means as well as the value they put on having television, in other words their 'moral economy.' How consumers paid for the television set and where they bought it also varied, with different shopping experiences available, from rental shops to department stores. When compared to the mediated discourse around how television was positioned as a consumer good, in advertisements and magazines, a disparity is laid bare between the idealised version of television consumption and the reported experience of it.

#### STATUS SYMBOL

The concept of distinction, however, was still a deciding factor in how television was understood as a consumer good; for many, television functioned as a status symbol or a means

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<sup>100</sup> "Announcing a new television projector," Valradio, advertisement, *Homes and Gardens* (December 1953), 125.

of conspicuous consumption. The 2003 MO directive offers us insight into how and why working class and lower middle class families acquired sets, unlike the 1949 MO directive for which the respondents were largely middle class and above average educated.<sup>101</sup> In the latter example, there is little evidence that the respondents felt that owning television was a status symbol, though one respondent glibly stated: ‘No, I won’t have television – until all my neighbours have it.’<sup>102</sup> In general, there was a marked scepticism about the cultural value of television and a desire to curtail its negative influence. The value of television, therefore, appears to have been different according to social class. For many of the respondents to the 2003 MO directive, they recall that owning a television was something to be proud of and marked a sense of achievement, or in other cases, was a means of ‘keeping up with the Joneses.’ A respondent remembers his stepfather buying a set ‘so that when we were invited to watch someone’s TV my stepfather could say we have our own set.’<sup>103</sup> Similarly, another response states that television ‘was just another possession my late father thought he ought to have to keep up appearances.’<sup>104</sup> Two respondents remember being invited to watch television for what they perceived as a reason for the owner to show off their wealth. One writes that ‘I first saw television in the early 1950s. A well-to-do colleague had invited me to his very fine home (he had married money) and we sat in a small, darkened room in which there was a tall mahogany cabinet.’<sup>105</sup> The other states that ‘we were only given sight of the neighbour’s television as a special privilege (or, more likely, to show off how much more wealthy they were than us).’<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> There was no report produced for the 2003 direction explaining the socio-economic background of the respondents, as there was for the 1949 directive. However, many of the respondents indicate their socio-economic situation when growing up, describing their up-bringing as ‘working class’ or highlighting economic hardship, which suggests that, whatever their socio-economic status at the time of responding, many of them identify as having grown up in working class or lower middle class households.

<sup>102</sup> “M-O panel on television,” 4.

<sup>103</sup> A883, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>104</sup> K798, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>105</sup> W1382, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>106</sup> W2322, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

For others, they remember the importance to their family of owning a television set for the first time. One remembers that television ‘sat in pride of place in our lounge as we have a family photograph taken with all us children standing in front of it as if it were a treasured heirloom.’<sup>107</sup> Others similarly recall television as being in a central position in the living room and that it was treated with special care. Some remember the arrival of the television set as being an exciting event in its own right: ‘it was so exciting when it arrived and we stood admiring it as it was left in the centre of the room’<sup>108</sup> and similarly, ‘I remember its arrival, which, if I remember rightly, was an exciting event at the time for all of us, mum, dad, and my brother and sister.’<sup>109</sup> This feeling of pride and excitement often came from having saved up to buy or rent a set. Responses reveal that for many young couples owning a television involved saving up for one:

The very first time I ever watched a television was in 1953. My friend had bought one so that we could watch the Coronation of Elizabeth and Phillip. The screen was nine inches square and filming in black and white but we thought it was marvellous! All ten of us crowded in front of this tiny screen and were fascinated. When we left their house, my husband and I were determined to get one. We saved hard for a deposit (£10) and bought it weekly for about five shillings (25p).<sup>110</sup>

These kinds of memories demonstrate the importance of communal viewing events such as the Coronation for persuading consumers to purchase their own sets. Another respondent remembers the excitement of seeing television for the first time for the Coronation in a small village in Wales:

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<sup>107</sup> B2728, “Images of the 1950s and 60s”; Lynn Spigel has written about family photographs posed in front of television sets in the United States, investigating why the area in front of the television set becomes a kind of stage set for family life.

<sup>108</sup> B2154, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>109</sup> N2058, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>110</sup> H260, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

I can recall the air of excitement, although I think it had more to do with this wonder of modern technology before us than with the Coronation itself [...] this new technology had an immediate appeal and everyone wanted one.<sup>111</sup>

There was a surge in sales preceding Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953. Many of the responses to the 2003 MO directive remember that their first set was purchased for the Coronation or that the televisions they watched it on, normally a relative's or neighbour's, were purchased for the occasion. Over 20 million members of the adult population of Britain were judged to have watched the service on the television, with 8 million watching it in their own homes and over 10 million watching it at the home of a friend, relative or neighbour.<sup>112</sup> The Coronation ended up as rather a poisoned chalice for manufacturers and retailers; the peak in sales in 1953 was followed by a recession in sales in the following years.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, the event of watching the Coronation on television has become a lynchpin for memories of purchasing a television set or finding it desirable as a consumer good. In this way, the Coronation still forms a key part in the narrative of television's development as a commodity.

The impact of neighbours and acquaintances having a set appears to have played a key role in influencing the decision to acquire a set. The television set *in situ* in the home was, in many ways, an alternative shop floor for promoting the television set. As has already been discussed, by the end of the 1940s, television was a familiar technology, so these early experiences of watching television in a domestic environment, albeit not always in everyday situations (such

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<sup>111</sup> W1813, "Images of the 1950s and 60s."

<sup>112</sup> Corner, *Popular Television in Britain*, 3

<sup>113</sup> A bi-annual intelligence department memorandum from the John Lewis Partnership archive states that 'the decrease on Television reflected the abnormal conditions of 1952 and 1953 arising from the Coronation, which had produced a considerable volume of anticipatory sales in the second half of 1952/53 and a very high volume in the first half of 1953/54, both to some extent at the expense of the second half of 1953/54.' W.P. Hickson, 'Review of Directorship of buying, Radio, Television and Electrical,' second half 1953/54. John Lewis Partnership archive, Cookham, 268/10.

as viewing the Coronation in large groups) were decisive for influencing whether or not the expense of television was worth it. A woman who grew up in Yorkshire wrote that ‘when we first acquired television, usually rented, it was something to be quite proud of. To be the first family in the street to get a telly was seen as something special.’<sup>114</sup> Another response concurs with this view:

Having your own television then was, without a doubt, a status symbol. Even now I still remember how friends and neighbours would find reasons for calling on us when the evening television programmes started.

Sets were quite expensive and beyond the reach of many working people. This made the renting of television sets the only way round this price barrier. I wouldn’t say we were well off then although working for myself provided me with an income somewhat above the working class average. And that must have been the reason, I suppose, why we must have been the first in our street of council houses to own a TV.<sup>115</sup>

Memories reveal that having a television set had the potential to impress the neighbours. Respondents claim that owning a television made you far more popular than before. Owning one of the first televisions in the street meant that the neighbours came round ‘to see what all the fuss was about,’ as one woman wrote.

The term ‘status symbol’ can be suggestive of something negative, in as much as it is a form of ‘showing off,’ but we have seen how it also facilitated an early culture of sociability around the television set, whereby it was common to invite neighbours, friends and family to view. In

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<sup>114</sup> E743, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>115</sup> R1418, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

the environs of these early television gatherings, an alternative platform for promoting television emerged, where television was transformed into a desirable consumer good. Likewise, the purchase of the television set was representative of success and hard work for many of the consumers who had to save up to own it. The standard narrative around television's trajectory from luxury object and status symbol to a widely owned household item does not allow for the fact that, while owning a television was no longer something to be proud of in parts of the country, for other parts, which may not have received the television service until the early 1950s, it remained an exclusive object. For example, while London had received television since 1936, it did not reach Central Scotland, the west of England, or Wales, until 1952. Thus, the value of television was different according to social class and geographical location and, for many consumers, television's value as a consumer good lay in what owning television represented in terms of economic success and hard work. The construction of television consumption as a means of distinction, therefore, was part of how consumers understood television as a consumer good, but not necessarily in exactly the same ways in which it was promoted in marketing material.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined how the television set was positioned and understood as a domestic consumer good. It built on the previous chapter, which demonstrated how television developed into an object-technology destined for home consumption. This chapter has shown that in the 1930s, when television was a niche, expensive commodity, it was positioned as a luxurious item, for wealthy consumers. Even as television developed into a more commonplace household object in the 1950s, this positioning of the set as an exclusive consumer good persisted. Different kinds of television sets were manufactured to appeal to a diverse range of consumer tastes, including sets designed to be traditional and 'aristocratic' and those designed to be contemporary and fit in with a modernist aesthetic. The first section argued that

‘distinction’ was a consistent trope for promoting television sets and that through this, television’s object form became embedded in post-war discourses around taste and consumption. Indeed, the regulating body for design practices – the CoID – created a debate about television design, positing that the modernist, streamlined sets were ‘better’ designs than the more ornate ones. Before the television set entered into the home on a mass scale, specific discourses were emerging around its consumption, whereby the design of the set became connected with different versions of taste and lifestyle. These associations with established taste matrixes were an attempt to legitimate television as a consumer good. This was imbued with specific inflections of class, given that the middle classes were more associated with the contemporary aesthetic championed by the CoID. In addition to this, the way in which television sets were positioned as consumer goods was gendered. Women, in their capacity as consumers and housewives, were both appealed to as consumers of television and used as a means to help sell them. We have seen how portable sets in particular were positioned as a consumer good for women; advertisements and promotional material equated them to an accessory that could match a woman’s aesthetic. Both taste and gender were significant aspects in television’s domestication. This chapter has argued that these connections were first made at the point at which television was positioned as a consumer good.

This chapter has also considered how television was understood as a consumer good. It has assessed how consumers themselves found value in television, making the decision on whether to acquire one, as this point of acquisition was absolutely essential to the mass consumption of television. It became apparent that the mediated version of television’s construction as a consumer good differed from reported experiences of obtaining a set. Consumers had to make their own value judgements about possessing a television set, according to their own ‘moral economy.’ For some consumers, television was not worth the money, or was only affordable when rental options became available, while, for others, television was a status symbol,

emblematic of hard work and their own material progress. In this way, television was a form of 'distinction' for some consumers, as it had been positioned in promotional material. In the process, television sets became imbued with various meanings; its object form became enmeshed with ideas about lifestyle, taste and gender, all of which were carried with it as it entered into the home.

# CHAPTER 4. CONSTRUCTING THE FLEXIBLE TV

## LIVING SPACE

### INTRODUCTION

The previous two chapters demonstrated that, at exhibitions and shops, as well as in advertisements and magazines, the television set was positioned as a domestic object-technology. Television's domestication, therefore, was pre-figured in the process of commodification. The following two chapters will be concerned with how television was given a place in the British home. This chapter will examine the role that television played in re-shaping imaginings of domestic space. It will consider television as a material object that had to be integrated into the existing material culture of the home, but also how the material culture of the home had to adapt to the arrival of television. Typically, homes had one television set, which was placed in the 'living' room – the space in which the majority of everyday living took place – therefore this chapter will consider how television impacted on this particular zone of the home.

The need to explore television's integration into the domesticity has already been highlighted by several media scholars, who have demonstrated that this is a vital stage in television's acceptance as a medium.<sup>1</sup> In particular, scholars have recognised how the arrival of television re-defined our relationship with home, reconfiguring the boundaries between the private and public spheres. Raymond Williams described this new configuration between the private and public spheres as 'privatised mobility'; a medium like television allows us to travel from within our homes.<sup>2</sup> Lynn Spigel has expanded on this conceptualisation to consider 'mobilised

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1: Literature Review.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003 [1974]).

privatisation,' again focusing on how changing technologies alter the dynamic between public and private.<sup>3</sup> More recently, David Morley has considered how media shapes 'home territories,'<sup>4</sup> while Deborah Chambers has argued that our understanding of home is reinforced by 'media imaginaries.'<sup>5</sup> Attention has been paid to how the content of television was moulded to the domestic setting in which it was primarily consumed. Scholars have discussed how certain features within broadcast television were designed to help domesticate television by fitting the broadcasting schedule around the social life of the home, such as the 'toddler's truce.'<sup>6</sup> This chapter intends to further the discussion of television's domestication by considering the object form of the television set, both how it was relational to the wider material culture of the home and how television's domestication was presented as dependent on disciplining the material form of the television set. In a British context, Deborah Chambers and Helen Wheatley have opened up a conversation about the object form of television and its place within domesticity,<sup>7</sup> but this has not extended into thinking about how television was situated within a wider material culture of home, which has been explored in other fields such as post-war British history, sociology and design history.<sup>8</sup> The intervention of this chapter will be to show that television's domestication in Britain was dependent on, and instrumental in, certain changes in the way in which living space was conceptualised, which was relational to other domestic objects and technologies, taking place at a specific historical juncture in the life of

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<sup>3</sup> Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Post-war America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Deborah Chambers, *Changing Media, Homes and Households: Cultures, Technologies and Meanings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Volume 4: Sound and Vision*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997), 93; Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), 134.

<sup>7</sup> Chambers, *Changing Media, Homes and Households*; Helen Wheatley, "Television in the Ideal Home" in *Television for Women: New Directions*, eds. Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 205-222.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 1: Literature Review.

the home. It will seek to demonstrate that television's impact on the home was articulated physically in its material culture, not just in figurative or socio-behavioural ways.

The chapter will argue that for television to be accommodated in the home, it was necessary to construct living space as informal and flexible, which was a means to ensure television did not become too dominant. The taming and restraint of television as an object was central to television's ideal domestication. The first section will demonstrate that a transition towards more flexible living arrangements was already taking place in architectural and design practices for the home but these changes were compounded by the arrival of television, which fundamentally reorganised how the use of space in the home was conceptualised. These changes were dependent on television's interaction with the other objects and technologies present in the home; television's domestication was presented as relational to the material culture of the home. I will term this model of domestication for television as 'flexible modernity.' The second section will show how the need to make living space as flexible as possible was born out of anxieties that television would come to dominate the home and preclude all other activities taking place. The effect of television on home life was an especial concern for women, for whom the boundaries between work and leisure in the home were often blurred. There was a clear desire to keep television in its place and to prevent it from taking over the home, which was ensured through a flexible living space, which could accommodate many activities, not only television. It will become evident that this construction of domestic space was aligned with masculine, middle class ideas about domesticity, which excluded more feminine and working class practices and tastes. The final section, therefore, will examine how homeowners negotiated the prescriptions of the flexible model and created their own version of 'flexible modernity' to aid the domestication of television. It will explore how householders did not always embrace television's integration by the means suggested in the mediated sources

and sought to retain some of the more traditional aspects of living space, for example, by preserving the fireplace as the focal point of the room, despite its obsolescence.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to analyse the role that television played in reshaping constructions of domestic space, the chapter will consider source material on how television was ideally integrated into living space. This includes material from magazines, such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Ideal Home*, design publication *Design*, produced by the Council of Industrial Design (CoID) and exhibitions such as the Festival of Britain (1951) and the *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition (1908-). These sources provide evidence of how television was situated in the ideal home and how designers were responding to the need to accommodate the new technology. There is a wealth of advice across the material about where to put television and how to negotiate its use, including magazine articles and room designs which were put on display at the exhibitions. The advice is often prescriptive in its tone, offering readers and visitors with an ideal, but often unachievable, model of domesticity. The majority of the material discussed here privileges a middle-class narrative about television's domestication, offering a top-down model. They provide us with an account of how television's position in the home was *represented* in visual culture and of the kinds of discourses that emerged around television's integration into the home.<sup>9</sup>

Mass Observation (MO) directives and photographs offer a different perspective to these mediated sources, giving us access to how the respondents to the directives spoke about potentially owning a television or their memories of first having one. The chapter will make use of the MO directives from 1949 and 2003 on television. The earlier directive reveals how respondents articulated how they felt about the prospect of having television in their homes,

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<sup>9</sup> See methodology section in introduction.

while the later directive tells us about how respondents remember the ways in which television changed their living space. A small selection of photographs from the Geffrye Museum archive and from my own family collections, taken in the 1960s and 70s, offer a limited snapshot of where televisions were sited in actual homes. It is through this material that we can find some evidence of how homeowners documented their own experiences of owning a television set. Altogether, this set of source material tessellate to form a picture of television's place within the constructions of home, both visual and discursive.

## PART 1: 'DESIGN FOR VIEWING': CONSTRUCTING THE IDEAL TV LIVING SPACE

### CONSTRUCTING THE 'MODERN HOME'

Television entered into the British home at a juncture of significant change; in the post-war period how homes looked, ideas about how they should function, and their geographical location were transforming. These changes to the home and the construction of the ideal modern home created the context in which television was domesticated. By exploring this context, it is possible to recognise that there were various ways in which the relationship between home and television were mutually reinforcing. Many of the changes in how homes were designed and conceptualised shaped the way in which television was accommodated in the home, while, as we shall see, television's arrival helped to cement many of the shifts, that might not otherwise have taken hold so firmly.

The post-war period was marked by movement from country to town and urban to suburban. While large parts of the population still lived in Victorian or Georgian townhouses, parts moved into newly built homes, including suburban houses and high-rise flats. The suburban trajectory was both a working class one, through slum clearance, and a middle class one, as people rejected the urban life in favour of the quieter, cleaner suburbs. In the interwar and post-war period, millions of new houses and flats were built and slum clearance programmes

relocated large swathes of the population into newly built council estates. The post-war Labour government built 900,000 new houses and by 1957, 2.5 million small houses and flats had been constructed.<sup>10</sup> The 1946 New Towns Act marked the beginning of a housebuilding programme that saw the creation of towns built according to carefully laid out plans of how a town should function. The new towns were built around a town centre, where the family needs would all be serviced, by schools, shops, local amenities and transport.<sup>11</sup> These included Hemel Hempstead and Harlow built in 1947, and later developments such as Milton Keynes and Peterborough in 1967. Another shift was the increasing levels of home ownership: in 1945 only 26% of homes were owned in England and Wales, by 1966, 47% were and in 1983, 63% of householders owned their homes.<sup>12</sup> Both these changes meant that, in the 1950s and 60s, homeowners had more incentive to decorate and maintain their homes themselves and more capital with which to do this. The third Parker Morris report on housing, entitled 'Homes for Today and Tomorrow,' from 1961, concluded:

All these changes are beginning to mean an easier, more varied and more enjoyable home life [...] These changes in the way in which people want to live, the things which they own and use, and in their general level of prosperity, and perhaps also the greater informality of home life, make it timely to re-examine the kinds of homes that we ought to be building.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, housing stock in Britain was becoming increasingly uneven, and despite these huge re-building programmes, even by the 1960s and 70s, large swathes of the population still lived in slum conditions.<sup>14</sup> The comfortable home was far from being universally available.

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<sup>10</sup> Claire Langhamer, "The Meanings of Home in Post-War Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005), 347-8.

<sup>11</sup> John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing: 1815-1985* (London: Methuen, 1986), 294.

<sup>12</sup> Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, 282.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, 305.

<sup>14</sup> Langhamer, "The Meanings of Home in Post-War Britain," 350.

The housing stock that was built from the late 1940s was marked by a new architectural style. The kind of homes that were being built tended to privilege open plan, light spaces, with combined living-dining areas, which forced upon the inhabitants the need to deformatize the space. It was, by its very nature, informal and flexible. The idea of the flexible living room, therefore, took root in the architectural and design practices that were defining the home in the post-war period. Design historian Judy Attfield argues that:

Open plan is one of the most fundamental changes in the British domestic interior since World War II. By its radical reversal of focus from “closed” to “open,” it embodied modernisation in the form of the house plan, thus incorporating, if only in theory, the notions of adaptability, mobility, and change. It paralleled, in microcosm, the utopian expectations of urban planning in the post-war period.<sup>15</sup>

Open plan was radically different to the older form of the living room – the parlour – which was the formal room in the Victorian home set aside for special occasions and for displaying family trinkets. The parlour came to be seen by architects as an ‘outdated architectural unit of enclosure that defined the house plan according to an unquestioned traditional social hierarchy’ and was described as obsolete in the 1944 Dudley Housing Report.<sup>16</sup> The open plan living room was less hierarchical, putting emphasis on communal living and family life, which encompassed a variety of activities and had to serve the needs of various members of the family or household. Open plan homes became synonymous with ‘modern’ ways of living, with the

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<sup>15</sup> Judy Attfield, “Bringing Modernity Home: Open Plan in the British Domestic Interior,” in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, ed. Irene Cieraad (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 77.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

design reflecting a new way of life. For example, *Ideal Home* magazine laid out its definition of ‘modern’ in an article in 1959:

Modern means. . . more light and glass; design stress on kitchen zoning, places for children to grow up, visual control for housewife; decisive use of built-ins; increased privacy despite glass; high standards of heating and insulation [ellipsis in original].<sup>17</sup>

For those who did not live in a new-build, magazine articles provided examples of how to modernise an Edwardian or Victorian home, advocating that householders de-clutter and streamline their homes (see Figure 4.1).<sup>18</sup> The open plan, modern aesthetic became associated with the middle classes in post-war Britain, as they used the new style to define their taste and lifestyle. As Penny Sparke illuminates in her article on the ‘modern home’:

From the late nineteenth century onwards, when increasing numbers of the middle classes used their homes as sites of class aspiration, the meaning of the modern home has been largely synonymous with the concept of ‘upward mobility.’ Thus the very ideal of the modern home, as understood by a large sector of the occidental population through the twentieth century, was synonymous with class aspiration and identity. In particular, as part of their attempt to align themselves with a new modern identity which was represented by their ability to be able to afford modern conveniences and to demonstrate that they had educated, modern taste, the middle classes identified themselves with modern-looking homes.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Anon, “Modern gets a fresh, spacious definition,” *Ideal Home* (October, 1959), 76.

<sup>18</sup> Anon, “Adapting the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup>,” *Ideal Home* (July 1953), 35.

<sup>19</sup> Penny Sparke, “Studying the Modern Home,” *The Journal of Architecture* 9, no. 4 (2004), 415.

The modern, flexible, open plan home was not, therefore, a comprehensively accepted aesthetic, but one whose meaning was inflected with specific constructions of class.

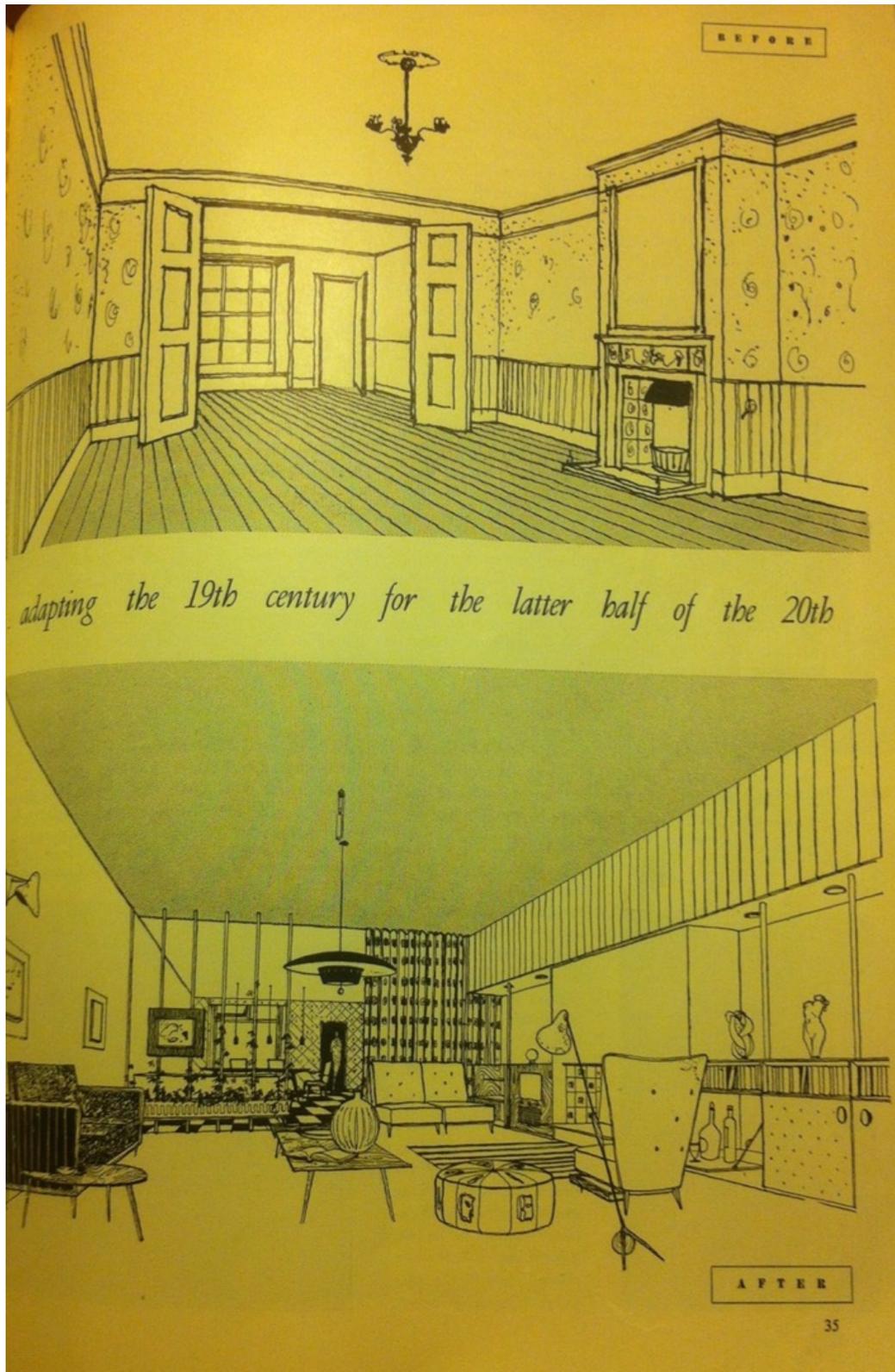


Figure 4.1: "Adapting the 19th century for the latter half of the 20th," *Ideal Home*, July 1953

The architecture and design of the modern home was not its only defining aspect; technology was also at its heart. Utilities such as heating, lighting and indoor plumbing, and technological objects, such as labour-saving devices, were all designed to make the home a more comfortable place to be, in which labour time was diminished. A promotional video from 1944 entitled ‘A Home for the Future,’ about the Churchill prefab houses built for returning servicemen, boasts of £80 worth of technological goods in the home, including refrigerator and oven.<sup>20</sup> The ‘home of the future,’ designed by Alison and Peter Smithson, which was put on display at the Ideal Home Exhibition in 1956 put technology at its heart. The exhibition catalogue explained that, in the living room, everything is built-in except ‘a scattering of chairs,’ however ‘Anne operates a switch and up rises a section of the floor to form a table, for dining or for coffee – just as she wishes.’ In terms of general services, ‘electric power, drawn from the nearest atomic power station, is used for heating, lighting, air-conditioning, water-heating, cooking, house laundry and refrigeration.’<sup>21</sup> A video promoting the 1964 Ideal Home exhibition focused on how mass production techniques would revolutionise the availability of luxury goods, how comfort would be available through the touch of a button with central heating and how labour-saving devices were changing the nature of work in the home for women as these technological devices became electronic slaves.<sup>22</sup> The 1961 Parker Morris report *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* used the term ‘revolutionary’ to describe the changes in technology present in the home since 1945. The report drew attention to the rise in domestic appliances as the marker of the ‘affluent society’ and, in this way, the acquisition of technological amenities and objects became intertwined with consumer culture. By 1963, there were television sets in 83% of

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<sup>20</sup> “A home for the future,” Video, British Pathé archive (1944). Available at:

<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/a-home-of-the-future/query/prefabs>, accessed 04/04/18.

<sup>21</sup> “The Home of the Future,” in *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (1956), 98. Held in the *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition collection, V&A Art and Design archive, London. AAD/1990/9.

<sup>22</sup> “Homes To Be Aka Ideal Homes Exhibition 1964,” Video, British Pathé archive (1964). Available at: <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/homes-to-be-aka-ideal-homes-exhibition/query/ideal+home+exhibition>, accessed 04/04/18.

private households, a vacuum cleaner in 72%, a washing machine in 45% and refrigerators in 30%.<sup>23</sup> Sparke comments on how

For new consumers, buying a house for the first time and equipping it with contemporary furniture, [...] new gadgets, a large refrigerator [...] and a new car in the driveway represented [...] their engagement with the post-war world and of defining themselves.<sup>24</sup>

The entwinement of the technology-centric, modern home with a middle class aesthetic was actively satirised on television in ‘The Babysitters’ (BBC, 1960), an episode of comedy show *Hancock’s Half Hour* (BBC, 1956-60). In the episode, Hancock and Sid, strapped for cash, sign up to a babysitting agency and find themselves in the home of the middle class couple Mr and Mrs Frobisher. Once the couple have departed for their evening out to the cinema, Hancock and Sid try to find the television. It not being on obvious display, they are dismayed to think that the couple might have lied about having one, until they come across a panel for controlling the windows, ventilation, central heating and the television. On pushing the button, the TV rolls forward from behind a panel in the wall, proceeding to bump Hancock from behind, who exclaims “well would you believe it! Isn’t that marvellous!” Technology is a central feature of the home; the panel provides, with the touch of a button, entertainment, warmth and ventilation. There’s even a two-way radio to communicate with the child upstairs. The home has everything embedded within it; in this fictionalized version of the modern home the amenities are invisible. ‘The Babysitters,’ in comedic fashion, draws attention to the changing shape of the middle class home in 1960s Britain. It is no coincidence that the search for the television set is used as the central comic device in the episode; as the chapter will now explore, more than any

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<sup>23</sup> Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, 283.

<sup>24</sup> Penny Sparke, *An Introduction to Design and Culture: 1900 to present* (London: Routledge, 2013[2012]), 102-3.

other domestic device, the television set re-shaped the landscape of the living room in the post-war British home.

#### FLEXIBLE FURNISHING

The contextual factors, which have been highlighted, created the circumstances in which television was domesticated. Television entered the home at a point when ideas about how the home should look and function were changing. As we have seen, in the post-war period a new conception of the ideal 'modern' home emerged, which was dependent on design, technology and utilities. These architectural and design practices were already helping to deformalize living space in the form of 'open plan' homes. However, it will become apparent that the need for an informal, flexible living space was compounded by the arrival of television. In a highly mediated process, the flexible television living space was constructed in exhibitions, magazines, and design publications, which all advised readers on how to accommodate television. The construction of the flexible TV living room was dependent on other furnishings, objects and utilities, which, in ensemble with the television set, allowed for multiple activities to take place within the same space, thus decreasing television's potential to dominate. The diminution of television's dominance of domestic space was central to its domestication and one of the ways it could be managed was through its physical positioning in the room. The importance of siting the television set correctly in relation to other furnishings and fittings was emphasised at the CoID's 1957 exhibition 'Design for Viewing' on show at the Design Centre in London. The BBC broadcast a short television show based on the exhibition, for which the script is all that remains. According to the script, the presenter Roma Fairley told viewers:

And open to the public now is an exhibition designed to show, not only well-designed television sets, furniture and furnishings likely to be associated in a viewing area, but

the siting of the television set. Its relation to seats, sources of light ocular requirements and so on. Oh yes, there is a right and a wrong way to view.<sup>25</sup>

Across a range of exhibitions and publications, television owners were presented with a guide to the ‘right’ way to view, to which this chapter will now turn its attention. We shall see how the advice consisted of choosing and arranging the correct furnishing, utilising lighting effectively, and where possible, building in television, so it could become fully integrated into the fabric of the home.

The idea that television remain a fixed focal point was not consistently advocated across magazines and exhibitions. The ‘tastemakers’ with a concern for the home, advised early television owners *not* to create a fixed furnishing arrangement around their television sets. Instead they encouraged them to invest in furniture that was portable and adaptable, so that it could be re-arranged around television viewing when needed, but, likewise, re-arranged to meet the needs of other activities. Furthermore, the design of the furniture itself was often adapted to meet the multiple demands on living space that the arrival of television had intensified. This chapter is arguing that the ideal living room was a flexible and adaptable space and that this was the foundations of its ‘modern-ness,’ which is captured in the term ‘flexible modernity.’

While we might think of the television set as fixed in one place, perhaps through necessity thanks to its size or the location of the plug socket, it was common to find images of living rooms in magazines and exhibitions in the 1950s and 60s where the television set is set to one side, often hidden behind another piece of furniture. In their ‘room of the month’ for September 1963, *Ideal Home* shows an image of a family each occupied by their own activities, with the

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<sup>25</sup> “Design for Viewing,” television broadcast script (1957). BBC WAC, Caversham, T32/891/1.

television set off and to the side of the frame. The caption explains that in ‘open plan living there is space for all the family to spread, relax and enjoy music and hobbies.’ Television is present in the image and therefore a possibility for entertainment, but it does not dominate or prevent the room from being used for several other leisure activities (see Figure 4.2). The article itself explains that ‘although we placed it against the wall, it is lightweight enough to pull out into a good viewing position.’<sup>26</sup> An article from *Good Housekeeping* in 1962 entitled ‘on living in peace with a television set’ illustrated various room schemes for ‘coping’ with television:

Either let the room absorb the television set, and rely on good modern design and practical positioning for it to create its own impact, without monopolizing too much of the room; or if you have a large living area, carve out a corner for viewing. The rooms we show here are all needed for purposes other than television, and they’ve all been planned to handle every activity without schizophrenic scheming.<sup>27</sup>

The emphasis of this article is on ensuring television does not ‘monopolize’ space and suggests ways to keep television in its place. Television owners were encouraged not to treat their set as a fixed or central object, but one that could be adaptable to the room, and, when needed, disappear from the centre of attention.

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<sup>26</sup> Anon, “How to live openly,” *Ideal Home* (September 1963), 71-73.

<sup>27</sup> Anon, “On living in peace with a television set,” *Good Housekeeping* (October 1962) 85-7.



Figure 4.2: “How to live openly,” *Ideal Home*, September 1963

The ideal way to make television ‘invisible’ when necessary was for it to be ‘built-in’ to the fabric of the room. In an article from *Ideal Home*, entitled ‘can television be built-in,’ the author writes ‘television demands building-in.’<sup>28</sup> Stored behind cupboards, embedded in walls, hung from ropes or placed on swivelling bases, these built-in television receivers became integral but not domineering (see Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4). The ‘House of the Future’ which was displayed at the 1956 Ideal Home exhibition featured a combined television and radio set embedded behind a glass panel, which could be switched on from anywhere in the room using a remote control.<sup>29</sup> The Frobisher’s television set, from *Hancock’s Half Hour*, was also built-in and controlled remotely. One example, featured in *Ideal Home* in 1959, showed a television set which could be revolved to face either the dining room or living room, and was hidden by

<sup>28</sup> Roy Norris, “Can Television be built-in?” *Ideal Home*, (February 1951), 30.

<sup>29</sup> “The House of the Future,” 97.

a marble panel when it was off (see Figure 4.4).<sup>30</sup> Built-in television receivers chimed with the modern focus of technology's place at the heart of the home and its seamless integration into it, suggesting that technology was to be mastered, rather than vice versa.



Figure 4.3: An example of a built-in television, *Ideal Home*, December 1951

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<sup>30</sup> Anon, "Concluding Entertainment," *Ideal Home* (December 1959), 51.

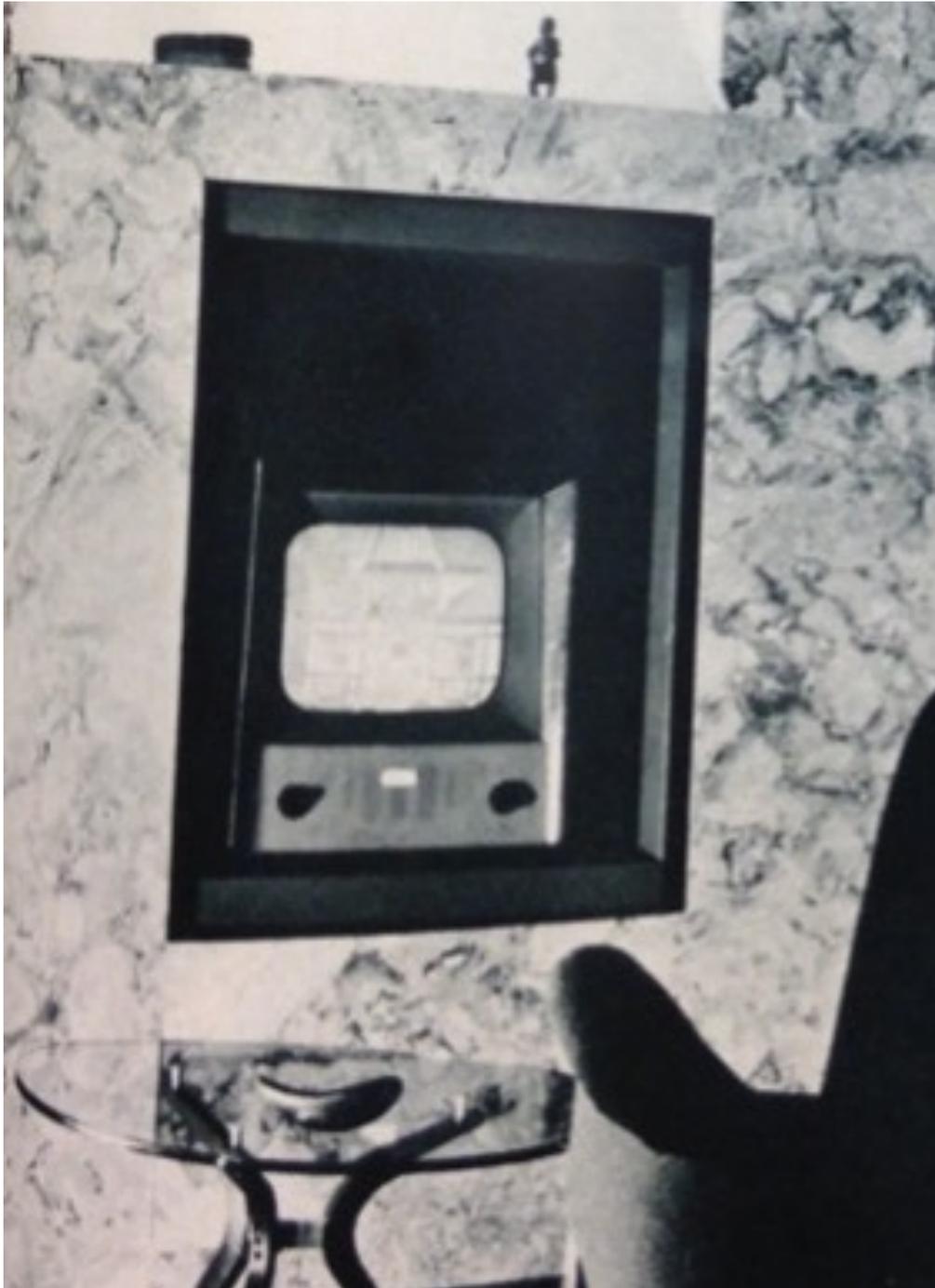


Figure 4.4: An example of built-in television, *Ideal Home*, December 1959

For situations in which building in was not an option, the combination of table receivers and a television table were used to make the television set portable so that viewing arrangements could still be adaptable. One suggestion for this was to place the television set onto a table with castors, so that the television set itself could be wheeled in and out of position when required. In *Ideal Home* in 1951 in the ‘items essential to better housekeeping’ section, a television

trolley with wheels was featured, with the explanation that ‘television or radio is easily transportable when mounted on this whitewood trolley.’<sup>31</sup> Such an approach was also advocated in the Festival of Britain publication *Design in the Festival*, which gives the example: ‘The two small tables nest under the large one, and the television set is easily wheeled into the best viewing position.’<sup>32</sup> Before the portable television became a reality, tables helped to maximise the portability of the set.



Figure 4.5: Separable television chairs, *Woman*, 8 September 1951

<sup>31</sup> Anon, “Items essential to better housekeeping,” *Ideal Home* (April 1951), 89.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon Russell, “Introduction: Design in Industry Today and Tomorrow,” in *Design in the Festival* (Council of Industrial Design, 1951), 12. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton. DCA/14B.



Figure 4.6: A Robin Day room design, *Ideal Home*, January 1960

In a similar fashion, chairs were also highlighted as an integral component of the flexible TV living room. Light, portable chairs were favoured over bulky settees so that they could be moved to form different seating arrangements, which was seen as especially useful for small rooms. In 1951, *Woman* magazine (see Figure 4.5) showed an example of ‘furniture separates,’ which ‘can be used individually [or] grouped cosily into a semi-circle’ and that ‘one chair has a shaped seat, which, when put together with the others, makes a curved seat which is ideal for

television viewing.’<sup>33</sup> Designer Geoffrey Salmon’s design for a small house for the CoID ‘Design for Viewing’ from 1957 also featured three separable chairs formed into a settee.<sup>34</sup> We see a similar design in the example from above from *Ideal Home* in 1963 (see Figure 4.2) and in many other designer rooms, including another living room in *Ideal Home*, designed by Robin Day, from 1960 (see Figure 4.6).<sup>35</sup> These separable chairs were notably designed in line with the modernist principles of minimalism and were a departure from the traditional, but popular ‘three-piece suite.’ Their malleability and ‘lightness’ not only made them suitable for allowing flexible television viewing, but also markers of modernity.

Furnishing design began to reflect the influence that television was having upon social behaviour within the home, with the furniture encouraging householders to multi-task their television viewing with other activities, in particular eating and drinking. For example, a television table from 1956 designed by William Perring (see Figure 4.7), featured in *Ideal Home*, was described as ‘much more than just another television table [...] Below are open shelves and cupboards, and pull-out flaps are useful for serving snacks.’<sup>36</sup> The table on which the television rested could provide multiple resources, storing other items and objects, while also helping to provide space to serve food, thus offering a means to multi-task activities while viewing. A 1956 edition of *Good Housekeeping* gives instructions on how to make a television seat that has two seats and a tray table fitted to the end, making it convenient to view and to consume food and drink at the same time as viewing.<sup>37</sup> A special feature on furnishing schemes ‘with a view to television’ in *Ideal Home* in 1954 shows four images of TVs in living rooms. It is promoting the furnishing company Mazda and Heal’s, which, it says, provides ‘maximum comfort for viewing and for other pursuits.’ One room design includes low tables, to allow for

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<sup>33</sup> Edith Blair, “Furniture separates,” *Woman* (8 September 1951), 20.

<sup>34</sup> “Design for Viewing,” CoID exhibition, Geoffrey Salmon’s room design, printed image (1957). Design Council archives, University of Brighton, 57-719.

<sup>35</sup> Anon, “Robin Day designs a living room,” *Ideal Home* (January 1960), 30.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Sheridan, “Furnishing Forum,” *Ideal Home* (March 1956), 159.

<sup>37</sup> Anon, “Talking or Television Seat,” *Good Housekeeping* (April 1956), 108.

‘refreshment without interruption.’ Another has a long settee so that ‘three to four people can watch the television in great comfort,’ and also features a low table which ‘provides for coffee, sandwiches, drinks and ashtrays within easy reach of everybody.’<sup>38</sup> DIY magazine *Practical Householder* instructed readers how to make an occasional suite for TV viewing that can ‘cope with the extra guests and provide them with a good-sized buffet table.’<sup>39</sup> In 1961, *Ideal Home* offered readers a multi-page guide to furnishings for television with a double spread on tables, which included an easy to push trolley for television snacks and a coffee table with extending sides for placing tea and coffee upon (see Figure 4.8).<sup>40</sup> These kinds of furnishings were designed to encourage television owners to eat and drink while viewing, advocating a culture of eating while viewing.

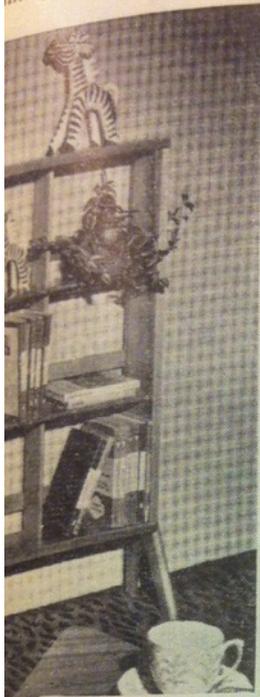
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<sup>38</sup> Anon, “With a view to television,” *Ideal Home* (March 1954), 54-55.

<sup>39</sup> E. Hawkesworth, “A folding TV chair and table,” *Practical Householder* (December 1957), 37.

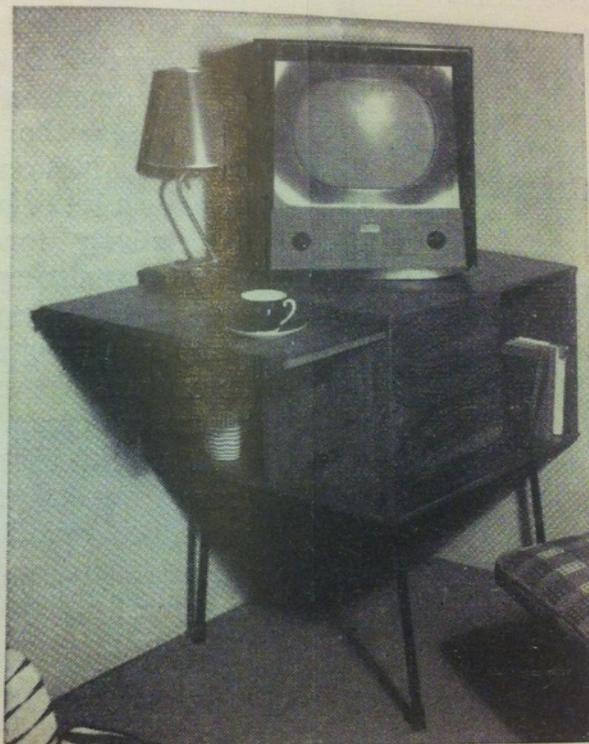
<sup>40</sup> Anon, “The Two Sides of TV,” *Ideal Home* (November 1961), 68-69.

A formal suite for a formal room: A. J. Milne's new dining group designed exclusively for John Lewis



elf is divided into  
ns and similar books  
ccording to subject

Pull-out flaps provide a surface for snacks in William Perring's new television table



Here, new Vanson units are arranged for the bedroom to provide for a full-length mirror



Unavoidably, if relays this is all designed to meet the average family existing furniture manufacturer

Only a few years ago the third piece of furniture bought had to live in a room where there was no space for it

Today we tend to buy pieces which really represent news of the "Home" the first time, offering furniture for bedrooms, kitchen, all with the same design. It should be like matching furniture to conventional standards

Nevertheless, in a formal suite still being sold it really does its job. A group designed in Italian blackwood by John Lewis, is a good example. The table has storage space, and is 3 ft. 4 in. when closed and 4 ft. long. A neat fold-out top into two and disappears

SOONER OR LATER we will have a collection of furniture to one hundred dollars. Their own special Beaver and Tap types are available and are divided so that each

LATEST COMER in television furniture is by William Perring. It is just another television top is designed for pull-out. Below are open pull-out flaps and

INTRODUCED at the Exhibition: a r

Figure 4.7: William Perring's television table, *Ideal Home*, March 1956



Figure 4.8: “Your side of TV”: television tables, *Ideal Home*, November 1961

One of the challenges of an open plan living space was how to divide up space when the walls that had previously demarcated rooms from one another had been removed. Despite open plan giving the suggestion of more space, newly built homes were getting smaller, thus using space effectively was another challenge for householders. In magazines and exhibitions, the shelving unit became a popular choice for both these reasons; with their multiple points of storage and ability to act as room dividers, shelving units were frequently suggested as a means for transforming how space was used. Indeed, it was commonly recommended as an ideal place to put a television set. A room designed for the ‘Lighting Your Home’ exhibition at the CoID Design Centre in 1959 used a shelving unit to effectively screen off the dining area from the

living space, while it also stored the television set, alongside a small desk, books and lamps.<sup>41</sup> Beyond acting as walls, these kinds of shelving units could provide the means for hosting many objects associated with domestic leisure, including televisions, radios, drinks cabinets, books, and ornaments. A room designed by Robin Day for the Festival of Britain in 1951, entitled ‘Entertainment at Home,’ featured a two-tier shelving unit, containing all of the above, as well as a pull-out writing desk. Television is here integrated into a system of other leisure objects and it is only one of many objects included in ‘entertainment at home.’ Unlike the earlier suggestions of wheeling the TV into place, these shelving units fixed the television in place, but did so in a way that made it relational to other objects, rather than highlighting it as a central feature.



Figure 4.9: HIFI and TV cabinet, *Practical Householder*, November 1960

<sup>41</sup> “Lighting your home,” CoID exhibition, photograph (1957). Design Council archives, University of Brighton, 59-2176A.

As it became common for householders to own large numbers of media objects, these shelving units were increasingly designed to accommodate TVs, record players, HiFis and radios.<sup>42</sup> In 1957, *Ideal Home* showed examples of ‘modern elegance in entertainment equipment,’ which included G-Plan shelving units for media objects and a Bourne & Hollingsworth corner bookshelf holding a television set at its centre.<sup>43</sup> DIY magazine *Practical Householder* offered readers instructions on how to build their own HiFi and TV cabinet (see Figure 4.9). The feature, from 1960, explained that ‘four into one will go,’ showing a picture of a man scratching his head as he contemplates all his media devices, while a woman sits watching a television set stored in the shelving unit.<sup>44</sup>

Lynn Spigel has highlighted how, in a United States context, the shelving unit named the ‘Storagewall’ was introduced as part of the modernist agenda to reduce clutter and ‘tidy-up’ media in the home. In ordering our things, these storage units began to function as networks, which linked ‘together seemingly unrelated objects into a pattern that suggests planned organization, a network rather than a hodgepodge of things.’<sup>45</sup> Thus television was integrated, via the shelving unit, into a leisure network, while simultaneously pointing to television’s status as one of the many activities that might take place in the living room. Putting television in a shelving unit was a means to discipline television; the television set was ‘tidied up’ and its position as a leisure activity diminished. These shelving units became a key means of display within the home, as they allowed householders to put their tastes ‘on show,’ in the form of leisure objects. The form of display could then indicate the value that they put upon the

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<sup>42</sup> Tom Perchard has specifically researched the domestication of audio equipment into the post war home, see Tom Perchard, “Technology, Listening and Historical Method: Placing Audio in the Post-War British Home” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 142 no. 2 (2017), 367-99.

<sup>43</sup> Anon, “Modern elegance in entertainment equipment,” *Ideal Home* (November 1957), 70-71.

<sup>44</sup> Anon, “HiFi and TV cabinet housing,” *Practical Householder* (November 1960), 1176-7.

<sup>45</sup> Lynn Spigel, “Object Lessons for the Media Home: from Storagewall to Invisible Design,” *Public Culture* 24, no. 3 (2012), 553.

different leisure activities; the desire to keep television from being a central object suggests that its status as a leisure object was questionable.

Television's relationality to other cultural objects, therefore, appears to have been an important tool to display a household's taste in culture and leisure. Across images from magazines and exhibitions, it was very common to find television sets positioned in the shelving units near to books. In a 1954 *Good Housekeeping* feature on a couple's home in Chelsea, the television set is embedded in a built-in shelving unit, surrounded by books (see Figure 4.10).<sup>46</sup> The portrait above the television contains a drinks cabinet, another leisure object frequently found alongside the television set. A 1960 article from DIY magazine *Homemaker* entitled 'Living-room distinction expressed' showed a drawing of a shelving unit containing a television beneath books, drinks paraphernalia, with a record player beneath it.<sup>47</sup> The title of the article implies that building this shelving unit will distinguish the living room in its display of the cultural leisure objects, to which the seating in the room points (see Figure 4.11). In Robin Day's 'Entertainment at Home' series for the Festival of Britain, a television projector was installed into the 'Music Lover's Room,' which featured a large selection of instruments (see Figure 4.12).<sup>48</sup> A room dedicated solely to musical instruments would have been a luxury afforded to relatively few householders, with pianos and other musical instruments commonly being found in the front room. The majority of examples have shown television sets being installed into spaces in which multiple activities take place, while this is an example of a room set aside for the enjoyment of one particular activity. The inclusion of television in this space – dedicated to a love of music – suggests that the medium had a role to play within the arts in Britain and that it could be a complimentary object to the instruments on display. Television's status,

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<sup>46</sup> Anon, "Homemaking in a Chelsea cottage," *Good Housekeeping* (September 1954), 68.

<sup>47</sup> Anon, "Living-room distinction expressed," *Homemaker*, supplement (September 1960), 8.

<sup>48</sup> "Music Lover's Room," Festival of Britain, photograph (1951). Design Council archives, University of Brighton, 51-2492.

therefore, was relational to its surroundings; television owners were encouraged to situate their television sets alongside other objects to demonstrate their ‘good’ taste.



Figure 4.10: “Home making in a Chelsea cottage,” *Good Housekeeping*, September 1954



Figure 4.11: “Living-room distinction expressed,” *Homemaker*, September 1960



Figure 4.12: “Music Lover’s Room” at the Festival of Britain, 1951, Council of Industrial Design archive

#### LIGHTING TELEVISION VIEWING

The living area was under more pressure to accommodate these various entertainment objects and to create the space in which they could be enjoyed. As we have seen, television owners were encouraged to make their living areas adaptable so that they could be arranged for viewing

whenever required. However, it was not only a spatial matter, but also one of visibility. Television, more so than audio media (such as radio), was seen to be a potentially dominating force in the living area because initially it was thought that it required darkness for viewing. In the ideal construction of the TV living room, lighting was positioned as a means to allow for other activities to take place alongside television viewing and was highlighted as a key aspect to the domestication of television. An article from *Ideal Home* in 1949 responded directly to the concerns about viewing in darkness:

Some people, not viewers, say, “we could not be bothered with television. We have too much to do to be able to sit idle in a darkened room every evening.”

Actually, the room does not have to be darkened. With the latest sets even full artificial lighting can be kept on. Then, after the novelty has worn off, members of a family can “view” or not, just as they can listen to, switch off, or ignore a radio programme.<sup>49</sup>

The article is illustrated with photographs showing how television lighting is not so different from normal lighting in the living room. The same author reiterates this advice in an article a year later in 1950:

The screens of television receivers are now so bright that viewing in a darkened room is quite unnecessary; in fact, it is not advisable because then there is too much glare [...] An advantage of the fireside position of the receiver is that the room lighting can be provided by a standard lamp placed on the other side of the fireplace; this will provide good light for anyone having work to do.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Norris, “Decision on Television,” 28.

<sup>50</sup> Roy Norris, “Television for the small house,” *Ideal Home* (February 1950), 43.

Here the lighting is directly accommodating the need for multi-tasking in the room, allowing for work to take place while viewing, or while somebody else views. In *Good Housekeeping*'s lighting guide in 1959 (see Figure 4.13), similar advice is given when 'someone may want to read or sew in the same room' as the television is being watched, which is to have 'a standard lamp with one bulb to diffuse the light upwards, and two which can be switched on to direct light downward for reading or sewing.'<sup>51</sup> General lighting advice was pervasive in magazines and exhibitions, with television often featuring in the discussions about how to light a room. Two previous examples – the 'Entertainment at Home' room at the Festival of Britain, 1951 and the CoID 'Lighting your Home' exhibition at the Design Centre, 1959 – showed visitors how to light a living area that contains a television receiver. *Homemaker* wrote an article about lighting your home, in which it emphasised that 'television is best viewed in subdued light' but also that 'you must provide suitable localized lighting for those members of the family who want to do other jobs in the same room.'<sup>52</sup> Lighting, therefore, was an effective means of allowing the living space to be flexible while television viewing took place; some other activity could still take place, as long as the correct lighting was used.

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<sup>51</sup> Anon, "Lighting where you need it," *Good Housekeeping* (January 1959) 38-39.

<sup>52</sup> Anon, "The right light for the room," *Homemaker* (November 1960), 1334.



Figure 4.13: Lighting guide, *Good Housekeeping*, January 1959

In Dennis Chapman's social survey on the home and social status conducted in the early 1950s, he noted that the reading lamp was an item most commonly found in middle and upper middle class homes because it was used for reading and sewing.<sup>53</sup> According to David Jeremiah, the advice about lighting television viewing led to working class homes, once they had acquired a television set, buying reading lamps in order to watch television.<sup>54</sup> In this instance, the introduction of television changed the diffusion of certain household items across class groups and challenged some of the established social markings within household consumption. This is an example of a very direct way in which television sets were relational to other objects in the home, as the purchasing of the television set influenced the purchasing of another object-technology.

<sup>53</sup> Dennis Chapman, *The Home and Social Status* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), 98.

<sup>54</sup> David Jeremiah, *Architecture and Design for the Family in Britain, 1900-1970* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 163.

## PART 2: KEEPING TELEVISION ‘IN ITS PLACE’: FEARS AND ANXIETIES

The main benefit of a flexible living space around television was that it prevented television from dominating and from precluding other activities taking place. Such an approach to the design and spatial arrangement of the living space coincided with a specific discourse around the arrival of television and its potentially domineering effect on home life. The discourse was born out of anxieties about how television might impact negatively on home life and expressed itself in the responses to the 1949 MO directive on television and in women’s magazines. Embedded within the discourse was a narrative of control and restraint under which television had to be kept, which influenced how television was domesticated.

Articles in women’s magazines frequently discussed the coming of television and its potential impact. The predominant tone that the articles offer to their reader is of control; television is presented as something that must be restrained. In an article from 1952 in *Good Housekeeping* about children’s television viewing, the author states that she has not succumbed to owning a television set, which implies that acquiring a television set is not so much a choice as an eventual loss of willpower. Not having yet ‘succumbed’ suggests that she occupies a moral high ground, but perhaps only for the time being. We see this kind of language in the 1949 MO directive; one man muses ‘perhaps I should succumb, and join in as spectator.’<sup>55</sup> In their memories of television, respondents in the 2003 MO directive also speak about the impact of television on their lives in terms of control; for example, ‘we had it under control,’ ‘it didn’t dominate our lives,’ and ‘television was merely entertainment and it was kept in its place.’<sup>56</sup> Others remember the opposite: for example, ‘my parents soon became dominated by the

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<sup>55</sup> 1095, “Television,” directive questionnaire (M-O February 1949). M-OA, University of Sussex. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Mass Observation Online, <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/DirectiveQuestionnaire-1949feb> [Accessed July 03, 2017].

<sup>56</sup> R2143; W1813; B1509, “Images of the 1950s and 60s,” directive questionnaire (M-O Spring 2003). MO-A, University of Sussex, sxmoa2/1/69/1/1.

television' and 'the bad thing about television [...] was the way it dominated your life.'<sup>57</sup> The advice from *Good Housekeeping* in 1952 about how to restrain the power of television over children also employed this language of control and loss of control: the author talks of parents taking 'responsibility,' using 'discrimination,' as well as using the set 'sparingly and critically.' A similar tone can be found in an article from *Good Housekeeping* from the same year, in which 'world famous critic' C.A. Lejeune advises readers on 'how to live with television.' She writes that:

There is no longer any question of *whether* to live with television. We have no choice. We've got to. And we might as well accept that and make the best of it.

It's true we may be strong minded enough to ignore or resist the temptation to buy a set for ourselves. But our neighbour almost certainly has one, and so have half the people we meet at parties, or in clubs or railway carriages. We have got to adjust ourselves whether we like it or not to a world through which television is spreading like a forest fire.<sup>58</sup>

Again, the question of owning a television is not framed as a choice; not buying a television is posited as a form of resistance and will power, which will almost certainly yield. Lejeune, unlike the previous author, however, proclaims to be enamoured of television, having owned one since before the war. If television causes harm, that is not the fault of the medium but the fault of the users: 'charges of this kind are not really charges against the thing at all, but an unconscious attempt to deny the people of the world any credit for powers of restraint, self-control and self-discipline.'<sup>59</sup> An article by male writer Beverley Nichols in *Woman's Own* from 1951 takes the same view:

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<sup>57</sup> L2604, "Images of the 1950s and 60s."

<sup>58</sup> C.A. Lejeune, "How to live with television," *Good Housekeeping* (September 1952), 37.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

Of course, some people – equally entitled to their views – will tell that television is a soul-destroyer and home-breaker.

I should have thought that if you have children, and it is time for them to go to bed, you tell them to go, and they go, and that is that. If you can't exercise authority, it is your bad parenting.

Naturally, every new invention which affects home life has its perils, but I should have thought that we British were too sober to be knocked off our balance by TV.<sup>60</sup>

The decision of whether to acquire a television set raised questions of control and power within the home; who exercised that authority and whether the arrival of new technology had the power to undermine it. In this way, owning a television was presented as something with potential dangers that needed to be controlled using judgement and restraint.

The need to control and restrain television was partly due to the anxiety that television had the power to waste time, distract and take over the home. Indeed, these fears were often listed as the key reasons why respondents to the 1949 MO directive were not keen to own a television in the first place. Of the 196 respondents who mentioned any drawbacks, 70% of this figure said that they believed television would prevent any other occupation because television required full concentration and many respondents mentioned that it would involve sitting in a darkened room where no other activities could take place.<sup>61</sup> A 24-year-old local government officer stated that 'if we had a set at home it would be an annoyance as we have only one living room and if the set is on one is forced to watch or to go to sleep.'<sup>62</sup> Magazine articles also

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<sup>60</sup> Beverley Nichols, "My World..." *Woman's Own* (April 19, 1951), 19.

<sup>61</sup> "M-O panel on television," File Report (1949), 5. M-OA, University of Sussex. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Mass Observation Online, <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/FileReport-3106> [Accessed July 03, 2017].

<sup>62</sup> "M-O panel on television," 8.

examined how television might take time away from other activities. An article by Monica Dickens in *Woman's Own* in 1951 decried television as 'the world's greatest time waster.'<sup>63</sup>

Several of the responses to the 1949 MO directive draw attention to how important their free time was for conducting work, small jobs and hobbies. Many respondents, both male and female, mentioned how little time they felt that they had and how television would undoubtedly diminish it even further. The advantages of radio were frequently espoused in the directive responses, especially the fact that it was possible to carry out other tasks while listening. A 25-year-old printer wrote:

For myself, I would not like [television]. I could not sit still to watch it. When the wireless or gramophone is playing one can be doing other things. I am always doing something when the wireless is on, woodwork, drawing or light reading.<sup>64</sup>

A response from a 32-year-old school teacher raised similar issues:

There are so many things I can do in my leisure time while listening to and enjoying the wireless, for example, reading, carving and modelling, gardening. I am so afraid that television would prove so attractive that my spare time would be spent straining my eyes looking into a fixed distance screen.<sup>65</sup>

The need to view in darkness was also highlighted as a cause for concern. A 24-year-old research chemist responded that 'since television involves a semi-darkened room and

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<sup>63</sup> Monica Dickens, "The way I see it," *Woman's Own* (30 August 30 1951), 14.

<sup>64</sup> "M-O panel on television," 7.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

concentration of eyes and ears, it is particularly crippling for any other activity.’<sup>66</sup> A 28-year-old flight attendant wrote that ‘I gather the best results are obtained in a darkened room and it would have to be an exceptionally fine programme which would cause me to shut out a summer evening.’<sup>67</sup> The advice about lighting was emphatic that television viewing did not have to take place in a darkened room, which responds directly to the respondents’ belief that it did.

Achieving optimal lighting, therefore, was a principal aspect in the domestication of early television. Other technologies had to go through a similar process of being made ‘tame’ to its consumers. Cinema historians have already highlighted how lighting was central to the moral panic around early cinema, as there were fears about what might take place in the dark theatres where films were being shown.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, lighting itself, during the domestication process of electricity, was a highly mediated process, in which consumers were encouraged to view electricity as a safe, clean technology, superior to gas.<sup>69</sup>

The disadvantage of television over radio – that television does not allow other tasks while viewing – was, according to the MO report on the directive, dwelt upon twice as much by women.<sup>70</sup> This gendered aspect of the directive has been brought to the fore by Helen Wood, whose article on the directive explores how housewives responded to the idea of television. Housewives, in particular, worried that television viewing would prevent them working, while radio was celebrated as a means of working while engaging in a leisurely activity. Wood argues that, for housewives who laboured within the home, the threat of television to their home lives

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>68</sup> Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> Graeme Gooday, *Domesticating Electricity: Technology, Uncertainty and Gender 1880-1914* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008).

<sup>70</sup> “M-O panel on television,” 7. Helen Wood notes that only 187 of the respondents to the directive can be identified as women, from a 732 total, see Helen Wood, “Television – the Housewife’s Choice? The 1949 Mass Observation Television Directive, Reluctance and Revision,” *Media History* 21, no. 3 (March 2015).

was very real and served to function as a ‘potentially disruptive force’ to both their labour and family time.<sup>71</sup> A male respondent to the MO directive sums up the perceived problem:

What housewife [...] would have the time to sit down and watch television in the morning and afternoon? With the radio women can work and hum with ‘Housewives’ Choice.’ With television they would not be able to watch the screen and make the pastry. What mysteries would be brought forth from the oven at dinner time, due to the irresistible distractions of the Cathode tube?<sup>72</sup>

A housewife responded with a similar view that:

the worst of television, from a housewife’s point of view, is it requires a darkened room, so that knitting or mending is out of the question, whereas to mend whilst listening to the wireless makes a tedious job less irksome!<sup>73</sup>

Such fears came to fruition for one male writer for *Good Housekeeping*, who recommended to readers a non-iron shirt because, as he explained, ‘since the day my wife bought herself a television set I have had to do most of the laundry myself.’<sup>74</sup> This echoes the wider fears about television’s impact on women’s labour, which were expressed in the MO directive and have been noted as a common concern for television’s domestication in the United States.<sup>75</sup> For women, labour and leisure time in the home were frequently blurred, even for women who worked outside the home. Feminist scholars have recognised how the modern home became an increasingly contradictory site for women, as the traditional boundaries between masculine

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<sup>71</sup> Wood, “Television – the Housewife’s Choice?” 349.

<sup>72</sup> “M-O panel on television,” 7.

<sup>73</sup> 1485, “Television.”

<sup>74</sup> Michael Churton, “Out with my spy-glass: a shopping prowl for men,” *Good Housekeeping* (March 1956), 95.

<sup>75</sup> Spigel, *Make Room for TV*.

and feminine were removed and a new ‘boundlessness’ introduced.<sup>76</sup> The arrival of television complicated the work-leisure boundary further, by putting more emphasis on the home as a site for leisure. As several scholars have argued, women’s role as chief consumer and carer in the home made them integral to the efforts to domesticate television in Britain and the United States, with women seen as central to television’s acceptance, while simultaneously also at risk from its influence.<sup>77</sup> Spigel has argued that the way in which women were addressed as television viewers and consumers in the United States was ‘inextricably intertwined with their useful labor at home.’<sup>78</sup>

Women’s magazines became a platform to discuss concerns about television’s influence and find ways to overcome them. In a letter written by Miss H.K. from Huddersfield to the ‘Woman to Woman’ section of *Woman* magazine in 1951, the domineering effects of television were lamented. She wrote that,

Living in the shadow of the new television station at Holme Moss we couldn’t resist the temptation to possess a TV set. Well, we’ve bought – and our troubles have started [...] we wonder if TV is the blessing it’s supposed to be.<sup>79</sup>

To which the magazine responded: ‘viewers seem to be divided among themselves [...] We dare not buy a TV set (even if we could afford it). We don’t get the darning done as it is.’<sup>80</sup> The official response from the magazine is that they do not own a television because it is expensive and would be a distraction, specifically from a feminine chore such as darning. As with the MO responses, the magazine expresses an anxiety that television will reduce women’s

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<sup>76</sup> Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 65.

<sup>77</sup> See Chapter 1: Literature Review.

<sup>78</sup> Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 75

<sup>79</sup> Anon, “Woman to Woman,” *Woman* (27 October 1951), 5.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

working time in the home. Despite this, one example of a letter written into weekly magazine *Home Notes* offered a more positive side effect of owning a television set. Miss Joan Richards wrote to express her delight at the new arrival into her home:

We've had a new arrival at home, and since it came our lives have been completely reorganised. [...] Our times of meals, hobbies, and evenings out are all governed by our latest addition to the family – but what grand fun it is.

When there's washing-up to be done, or meals to be prepared, everyone lends a hand so that Mother shall be finished in time to "view" with us. [...] I'm one reader who thinks that television is tops, and I'm sure that many more of your readers feel the same.<sup>81</sup>

In this instance, labour within the home was reported as being rearranged to facilitate the mother's viewing, suggesting television re-structured labour division, offering a counter perspective to the views expressed in the 1949 MO directive. In 1957, *Woman* offered readers an example of a way for women to be able to view TV while doing the washing up (see Figure 4.14). The open plan design of the kitchen-living room meant that the TV was visible from the kitchen.<sup>82</sup> The following year, construction and housebuilding firm Wimpey launched its TV house, in which there was a window behind the sink, looking into the living room so that it was possible to watch TV while doing the chores.<sup>83</sup> The blurred boundary between women's work and leisure became embedded in the actual design of these homes as walls were removed or made porous to facilitate a woman's leisure as she worked.

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<sup>81</sup> Anon, "Your letters to us," *Home Notes* (10 February 1950), 40.

<sup>82</sup> Anon, "We can wash up and watch TV," *Woman* (25 May 1957), 20.

<sup>83</sup> Jeremiah, *Architecture and Design for the Family in Britain*, 170.

The model of the TV living room, which favoured a flexible approach and the ability to multi-task, resonated with the apprehensions that potential television owners had about the impact of television on their domestic lives. Attitudes towards television in the directive and magazines were often ambivalent; respondents, writers and readers were anxious about the impact that television would have on their home lives, in particular their existing work patterns and hobbies. The need to control and restrain television developed, a sentiment felt more acutely by women, whose time was already spread thinly across the demands of their various roles in the home. Magazine articles spoke to these kinds of concerns by providing television owners with a flexible model that diminished the impact that television might have on home life through the physical positioning of the set, in relation to the rest of the room. The magazines, alongside exhibitions and designers, were educating their readers, in particular women, about how to domesticate television, attempting to displace anxieties about it. The emphasis on multi-tasking television viewing, and its relational position to other objects of leisure, such as radios and books, demarcated television as only one of many leisure activities in the home, rather than a domineering force that would take over.



Figure 4.14: "We can wash up and watch TV," *Woman*, 25 May 1957

### PART 3: PROBLEMS, RESISTANCE, NEGOTIATION: FLEXIBILITY AS A LIVED REALITY

In response to reservations about television's impact on domestic life, designers, magazines and exhibitions in the 1950s constructed a model of flexible living around the television to 'keep it in its place.' Yet magazine articles written in the late 1960s and early 1970s continued

to discuss problems concerning the domestication of television, indicating that the model offered in the 1950s had either not been a success or had not been adopted. As early as 1962, *Good Housekeeping* drew attention to television as always having ‘been a problem child in the home.’ It states that ‘when [television] first arrived, it took over the living-room, and we dotingly let it dictate out furniture arrangements, and elbow out all the other activities normally absorbed by the family room.’<sup>84</sup> As we have seen, over a decade of advice had already been offered to television owners by now, directly aimed at preventing the problems that the article lists. In 1968, *Homemaker* magazine called ‘finding room for television’ an ‘old problem’ and took issue with the fact that so ‘few people have managed to devise adequate housing for that most common of domestic objects, the TV set.’<sup>85</sup> A 32-page advertisement for Thorn electronics featured in *Homes and Gardens* in 1969 concurred with this view, writing that ‘television has become almost as important a piece of furniture as a sofa [...] Seldom, however, is sufficient thought given to its placing.’<sup>86</sup> Television sets were even anthropomorphised into unattractive creatures. *Homemaker* in 1969 described a switched-off set as ‘a cumbersome piece of furniture, that just gazes, blank-eyed into the room.’<sup>87</sup> *Good Housekeeping* called it a ‘lumbering monster that not only dominates your entire family but all the furniture too’<sup>88</sup>, likewise *Homemaker* in 1970 labelled it the ‘one eyed monster’ which ‘tends to dominate your living room as it squats there on the coffee table or stand.’<sup>89</sup> These descriptions suggest that even by the 1970s, the domestication of television was an on-going process, still facing challenges.

Over two decades after television began to proliferate into the British home, its position in the home remained problematic and advice continued to be given on how to resolve it. It begs the

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<sup>84</sup> Anon, “On living in peace with a TV set,” *Good Housekeeping* (October 1962), 83.

<sup>85</sup> Anon, “Homemaker takes a look at old problems,” *Homemaker* (May 1968), 24.

<sup>86</sup> “At home with Thorn,” advertisement feature, *Homes and Gardens* (July 1969), iv.

<sup>87</sup> Anon, “Compact unit for TV and hi-fi equipment,” *Homemaker* (June 1969), 44.

<sup>88</sup> Anna Baranski, “Anyone for tennis?,” *Good Housekeeping* (June 1970), 108.

<sup>89</sup> Anon, “Get your viewing on the right lines,” *Homemaker* (January 1970), 35.

question of *why* television's place in the home persisted to be contested and why there remained a perceived need to continue to advise television owners on how to integrate it. This section will examine how the construction of the ideal home as an informal, flexible space was not always aligned with the desires, tastes and lifestyles of householders. The practical approach to domestic design, which was flexible, open and adaptable was associated with masculine, middle class notions of taste and design. As design historians have already argued, this prescriptive model of modern living largely excluded, and even rejected, feminine and working class tastes.<sup>90</sup> The approach did not take into consideration the different relationships to home, in particular, the fact that design practices in the home often have an emotional basis, which is expressed through objects and their display. An alternative material culture around the television set developed, which did not meet the criteria of modern designers and was more reflective of the lived reality of owning a television set. This section will argue that this approach to television's domestication was also based on flexibility, but a form of flexibility that accommodated various tastes and lifestyles, as opposed to the limited, prescriptive model offered by designers. In this way, householders created their own version of 'flexible modernity' to accommodate their television sets. These forms of resistance are incredibly important; Attfield argues that modernity 'was expressed through the adaptability with which families constructed and reconstructed their surroundings to fit in with their changing lifestyles rather than passively accepting the aesthetic styles the design experts tried to impose on them.'<sup>91</sup>

#### COMPETING FOCAL POINTS

One of the key domestic object-technologies that has yet to be discussed is the fireplace and that is because the positioning of the fireplace in relation to the television set could not be resolved through the flexibility model. While there are some examples, as we shall see, where

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<sup>90</sup> See Sparke, *As Long as it's Pink* and Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*.

<sup>91</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*, 78.

magazines and designers told television owners to replace obsolete fireplaces with television receivers, the fireplace remained a common feature of the living space, to which the television had to defer. The positioning of the television set in relation to the fireplace became a subject of a debate about how the living space should be arranged and, arguably, this debate is emblematic of the struggle between tradition and modernity in domestic design. In this debate, we shall see that designers and design publications failed to understand the symbolic significance of the fireplace as a marker of 'homeliness.' From this, there is evidence of why the prescriptive model for arranging living space around television did not manage to create a model of flexibility that catered for the multifaceted requirements on living space, that are not just physical, but also sentimental.

In 1951, *Ideal Home* magazine's television and radio feature writer, Roy Norris, drew attention to the problem of the clash between fireplace and television viewing:

In television homes, at around 8 o'clock most evenings, the round-the-fire seating arrangement comes into conflict with the round-the-screen pattern and inevitably an unsatisfactory and untidy pattern emerges.<sup>92</sup>

Six years later, in 1957, the problem was highlighted again at the CoID exhibition 'Design for Viewing.' The edition of *Design* magazine featuring the exhibition explained:

Already TV has caused many families to rearrange their lives, but how far have they adapted their homes to meet the challenge of this new way of life? A tradition of centuries has grown up around the fireplace as the focal point of the living room and as a result the grouping of chairs and small tables has been given a logical and

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<sup>92</sup> Norris, "Can television be built-in?," 30.

cohesive pattern [...] With TV however, a new focal point has been added which often leads to the break-up of this pattern and to a confused array of furniture that allows neither benefit from the fire nor comfort for viewing.<sup>93</sup>

In the early years of television, the fireplace remained an important source of heating in the home, therefore, for many it was necessary to position the television near the fireplace for this reason. Magazines did recognise this necessity, with early articles often suggesting that the television be placed next to the fireplace. In 1949, *Ideal Home* told readers ‘in the warm months the TV can be anywhere in the room [...] but in winter we need to sit near the fire while we look-in, which means the best position for the set is one side or other of the fireplace.’<sup>94</sup> Several responses to the MO 2003 directive remember the television being situated near the fireplace for warmth reasons. One respondent wrote ‘in those days we had a fire in the fireplace, so the furniture had to be arranged around that, the TV took second place in the alcove at the side of the chimney breast.’<sup>95</sup> The fireplace became part of the ritual of television viewing for one family home, in which ‘whilst the women cleared the dishes and did the washing up, father would stoke the (coal) fire and arrange the chairs around the set.’<sup>96</sup> This response shows a flexible approach to television in terms of furnishing and labour division in the home, as we have already seen advocated in magazines and by designers. However, another response recalls it being more challenging to situate the television in regard to the fireplace:

Like most houses we had an open fire and the tendency was to have this as the object to sit round, this was partly because it was the warmest part of the room in the winter.

Because of this it was difficult to site the TV in a place where it could be viewed and

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<sup>93</sup> Anon, “Looking at TV,” *Design* 100 (April 1957), 67. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton.

<sup>94</sup> Norris, “Decision on television,” 43.

<sup>95</sup> L2281, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>96</sup> S2246, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

for everyone to enjoy the warmth of the fire as well. I have been trying to visualise how we managed to overcome this with about eight people for I know there was a problem but I do not recall how or if we did overcome it satisfactorily.<sup>97</sup>

This suggests that, in some cases, television's arrival created a confusing design scenario in the home, which people were unable to resolve themselves, therefore education was necessary to help them in the transition from the 'tradition of centuries' into a modern pattern of living, focused around the television set. An article on a young couple's flat in *Good Housekeeping* in 1954 celebrated the fact that the room has no fireplace, it says 'instead, a television set, essential to their life, combines with built-in shelves to form a focal point in the room.'<sup>98</sup> It is television here, which is essential to their lives, pointing to the increasingly obsolete place of the fireplace in the home.<sup>99</sup> From the same year, an article on furnishing schemes 'with a view to television' in *Ideal Home* writes that 'where an open fire is not needed, the area can be used for the fresh focus of many modern rooms – the television set'<sup>100</sup> Similarly, the television becomes the focal point of the room and the use of the word 'fresh' implies that this would modernise the room, updating it from the traditional focal point of the fireplace. A year later, *Ideal Home* calls the fireplace an 'anachronism' and that the television must now be considered.<sup>101</sup> This further emphasises the idea that television was the modern focal point for the living room and that the fireplace, as it became less important for heating, was not only old-fashioned, but anachronistic, implying that it had no place in a contemporary designed room.

Despite the various efforts of design writers, one of the most common places for a television set to go, from across a wide variety of source material including domestic magazines and

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<sup>97</sup> H1806, "Images of the 1950s and 60s."

<sup>98</sup> Anon, "Homemaking in a Chelsea cottage," *Good Housekeeping* (September 1954), 68.

<sup>99</sup> As other forms of gas and electrical heating, including central heating, became more common, the fireplace became a decorative feature rather than a necessity.

<sup>100</sup> Anon, "With a view to television," *Ideal Home* (March 1954), 54.

<sup>101</sup> Anon, "Furnishing in relation to heating, lighting and television," *Ideal Home* (October 1955), 96.

exhibitions, was to one side of the fireplace. Initially this was because of the fireplace's role in heating the home, but even as central heating became more commonplace in the 1960s, the fireplace remained a feature of the British home. The fireplace was often celebrated in domestic magazines. In 1965, *Good Housekeeping* ran a feature called 'the fireplace: the heart of the home.'<sup>102</sup> *Homemaker* in 1970 wrote that 'whether it holds a blazing fire or not, a hearth, surrounded by a few of your favourite things, is still the focal point of a cosy home.'<sup>103</sup> Though the fireplace was no longer the primary means of heating the living room, it often remained in place as the focal point of the room, not least because it was a means of displaying family trinkets but also because of its association with warmth and cosiness. This is confirmed by the findings of sociologist Dennis Chapman, who wrote in his 1955 study on the British home:

The fireplace is one of the most complex social-technical artefacts of the home. Its primary purpose is space-heating, but appears to have deep mystical connotation and great aesthetic importance. It locates and focuses the family group in summer and winter.<sup>104</sup>

Television became an unwelcome competitor to the traditional hearth. In 1962, *Good Housekeeping* lamented that television had 'tugged the family away from the traditional centre of interest, the fire-place – or else loyalties were divided between the two.'<sup>105</sup> One response to the 2003 MO directive recalls a conversation on the subject taking place between her mother and an acquaintance: 'I remember my mother discussing with another lady – the Head Master's wife, in fact, how right it was that the fire, not the TV, should be the focal point of any lounge.'<sup>106</sup> While women's magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* offered advice about

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<sup>102</sup> Anon, "The fireplace: the heart of the home," *Good Housekeeping* (November 1965), 54-61.

<sup>103</sup> Anon, "Cosy ideas for fireside warmth," *Homemaker* (February 1970), 29.

<sup>104</sup> Chapman, *The Home and Social Status*, 96.

<sup>105</sup> Anon, "On living in peace with a TV set," 83.

<sup>106</sup> M2986, "Images of the 1950s and 60s."

domesticating television which was in line with the models offered by designers and the CoID, as we have already seen, their motivations for keeping television ‘in its place’ concerned ensuring television did not interrupt family life nor upset a housewife’s labour time within the home. The fireplace with its symbolic meanings of tradition and family life had a different resonance in this context than it would for the predominantly masculine approach to design and the home that characterised design publications. Trevor Keeble contends that this has a gendered element; the fireplace has been associated with the woman and family life, thus explaining why women, in particular, continue to see it symbolically, even after its function as heater has become redundant.<sup>107</sup>

In May 1962, *Design* magazine mocked anxieties about the competition between the television and the fireplace, likening it to a moral panic, where the dual focal point is blamed for the breakdown of family life. It reads:

Ever since the introduction of television, sociologists, psychologists and interior designers have been worried by the possible ill effects caused by the introduction of a new focal point into the living room. For thousands of years during the long winter evenings, families have formed a tight semi-circle round the fire, symbolizing the all-important unity of family life. Nowadays, however, families do not know whether to group themselves round the fire or the television set and the result of this uncertainty can be seen in the break-up of family life and the increase in crime among young people. The manufacturer of the Foculpoynite combining for the first time a 23-inch TV receiver with an electric log or coal fire, must therefore be congratulated not only for introducing a product which is, in its own right, a remarkable piece of design, but

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<sup>107</sup> Trevor Keeble, “Domesticating Modernity: *Woman Magazine* and the Modern Home,” in *Design and the Modern Magazine*, eds. Jeremy Aynsley and Kate Forde (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 108.

also for demonstrating how new products can solve some of the fundamental social problems of our time.<sup>108</sup>

The article is a parody review of the 1962 *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition, the annual trade exhibition showing the latest trends in home design and consumer goods. Through this parody, it criticises the perceived ridiculous nature of some of the designs present at the exhibition, creating a divide between the high-brow design championed by the CoID in *Design* magazine and at its Design Centre compared to the more commercially driven Ideal Home Exhibition, which was aimed largely at women as the main homemaker. The author may indeed be referencing a design from an earlier Ideal Home exhibition; in 1949, the exhibition featured a fireplace with a television receiver built-in above the electric fire and, as previously discussed, the Ideal Home Exhibition was recognised as a space more associated with the female consumer. In 1967, in his book published by the CoID *Sound and Vision*, Peter Sharp was also unenthusiastic about the dual focal point of television and fireplace:

The British mania for the open fire, or an imitation effect from a disused fireplace, dominates a large majority of room settings. Even with central heating very few rooms show the flexible attitude to room setting adopted for many years in Scandinavia and America. As a result there is a tendency to arrange chairs round the hearth, and there could be no worse inhibition to arranging a room especially for television. Television must therefore be the first consideration as it requires a freedom from distraction visually, and needs to be placed away from flickering flames, real or imitation.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Anon, "Social problems solved," *Design* 161 (May 1962), 59. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton.

<sup>109</sup> Peter Sharp, *Sound and Vision* (Council of Industrial Design, 1967), 54. Design Council archives, University of Brighton.

He dismisses the emotional attachment to the ‘open fire,’ favouring the need for optimum viewing conditions. The flexible approach to living in Scandinavia and the United States is praised, implying that this had not been achieved in Britain, despite the advice offered. This criticism demonstrates that the writer failed to take into account the sentimental approach to room design, whereby the ‘mania’ for tradition described was also a guiding principle for how to make a room work for its inhabitants. We have seen, therefore, that the retention of the fireplace is an example where the modernist agenda was resisted. In this instance, the idealised flexible model for television’s domestication did not work, as the fireplace had a greater meaning than its practical purpose in the room.

#### FLEXIBILITY THROUGH RESISTANCE

The previous chapter notes that scholars such as Judy Attfield and Daniel Miller have argued that resistance shown by inhabitants towards prescriptive living conditions imposed by designers and architects are essential to ‘modern’ ways of living.<sup>110</sup> These forms of resistance are often the ways in which identity was expressed and control exerted over living environments, a process Daniel Miller describes as ‘appropriation.’ Focusing on the kitchen, Miller observes how different inhabitants on the same housing estate moulded the blank canvas they were offered to meet their own needs and tastes. He argues that ‘householders must enter into creative strategies of consumption to appropriate that which they have not themselves created.’<sup>111</sup> Attfield has demonstrated the ways in which householders sought to reclaim the parlour in the form of small spaces where they can display trinkets and meaningful objects.<sup>112</sup> The retention of the fireplace, despite developments in central heating and the competing focal point of the television set, is another example of householders retaining a formal, traditional

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<sup>110</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*; Miller, “Appropriating the State on the Council Estate.”

<sup>111</sup> Miller, “Appropriating the State on the Council Estate,” 370.

<sup>112</sup> Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*, 64.

part of the home. The alignment of the ‘modern’ home with middle class taste meant that the tensions that arose between the traditional and the modern was, in part, about class identification, as Penny Sparke sums up:

The working and lower middle classes looked to a modern lifestyle but were more reluctant than the middle class proper to abandon the more decorative, expressive aspects of the material culture with which they surrounded themselves.<sup>113</sup>

A small selection of photographs of living rooms from the 1960s and 70s give us an indication as to where televisions were situated in homes from across Britain (see Figure 4.15, Figure 4.16, Figure 4.17, Figure 4.18 and Figure 4.19).<sup>114</sup> Frequently the television has become part of the décor by its use as a form of shelf, turning it into an extension of the mantelpiece for storing trinkets and objects. Several examples show the television set with plants, lights and other objects placed on top of it, including, in one example, a place to put Christmas cards (see Figure 4.19). The television set itself, for some owners, was an object of pride that owners did not want to disguise or hide away, as the flexible model suggested. A respondent to the 2003 MO directive wrote that their set ‘was as highly polished a piece of furniture and took pride of place in the main living room where everybody could see it.’<sup>115</sup> Another wrote that their set was ‘the central piece of furniture in the room. A beautiful polished mahogany cabinet.’<sup>116</sup> In the photographs, the set is placed in a variety of locations, including on stools, tables, in shelving units, sometimes by the fireplace. Some of the photographs show the variety of activities that took place in front of the television that did not involve viewing. Lynn Spigel

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<sup>113</sup> Sparke, “Studying the Modern Home,” 415-6.

<sup>114</sup> These were mostly obtained from the Geffrye Museum’s ‘Documenting Homes’ collection, but two photographs are my own photographs from a family collection.

<sup>115</sup> S2581, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>116</sup> W1388, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

has argued that the gap created by the television set became a performative space in which family life could play out.<sup>117</sup>



Figure 4.15: Television set in a home in Pinner, Middlesex c. 1962, author's own photograph

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<sup>117</sup> Lynn Spigel, "TV Snapshots: An Archive of Everyday Life," conference paper (SCMS, Chicago, 2017).



Figure 4.16: A family play in front of television set, Pinner, Middlesex, c. 1962, author's own photograph

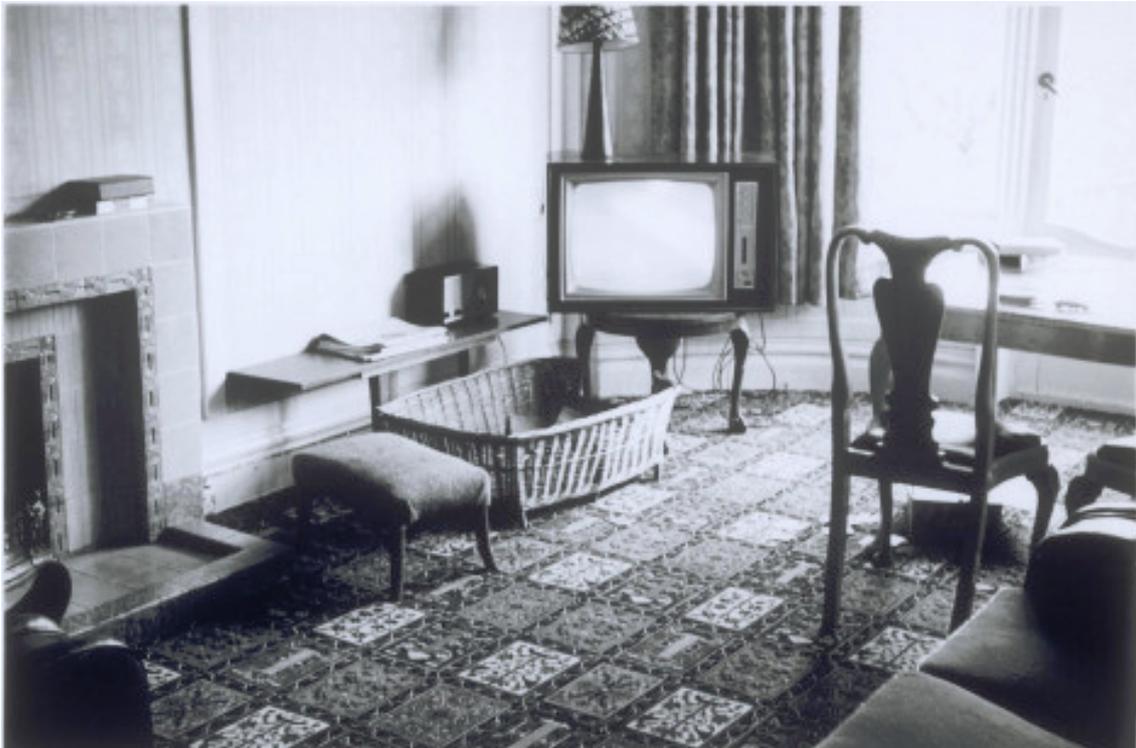


Figure 4.17: Sitting room, Whetsone, c. 1972, Geffrye museum DH 158/2011-55



Figure 4.18: Dining room, Castle Hill, Stafford, c. 1982, Geffrye Museum DH 736/2012-87



Figure 4.19: Children in front of television, Cuffley, 1970, Geffrye Museum, DH 507/2011-30

Households found their own way of ‘appropriating’ the television set into their lives that did not necessarily follow the suggestions laid out in mediated sources such as magazines. This was partly down to practicalities. We have already seen how some householders had to place their set near the fire for warmth, and another such example is that of the plug socket. A few responses to the 2003 MO directive recall that their television set had to go in place because there was only one socket available. For example, one respondent recollected that ‘the TV was in the corner of the room near the French Windows as that was the only corner of the room where we had any power sockets.’<sup>118</sup> Another recalls that ‘we’d needed to employ an electrician to extend our range of power points as there was only one point in the entire house’<sup>119</sup> The implementation of ‘flexible modernity’ was only possible with the provision of the utilities and technological devices, but these were not readily available to all in the 1950s and 60s, therefore, householders had to negotiate the resources and spaces that they had.

Television owners’ social behaviour around television was another aspect of how the lived reality differed from the suggestions offered in the mediated sources. Some householders chose to view television in the dark, despite the frequent advice not to, such as one respondent to the 2003 MO directive who stated that ‘you always watched in a darkened room.’<sup>120</sup> Another wrote that ‘we all used to watch the TV in the dark, as if we were at the cinema’ and another that ‘we used to pull the curtains to watch, as the grainy picture was easier to watch in the dark.’<sup>121</sup> Some television owners, therefore, chose the less flexible option of viewing in darkness, either to create a specific atmosphere more akin to being at the cinema, or to enhance the viewing experience because the picture quality was not yet advanced enough. Many respondents to the 2003 MO directive also remember that eating in front of the television was forbidden in their

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<sup>118</sup> L321, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>119</sup> N399, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>120</sup> R1025, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

<sup>121</sup> B2969; M1979, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

homes. While we have seen in part one how television owners were encouraged to eat in front of their television sets using tables and trays, many householders decided to maintain the formal ritual of eating at the dining table, before viewing television in the evening. More traditional objects, such as the fireplace and dining table, still had a role to play within the home, with their resonances of family life and the rituals associated with maintaining it. These objects allowed householders to make their own flexible arrangements around the television, which, though seemingly inflexible in one regard, did allow for the multifaceted patterns of everyday living.

Penny Sparke has argued that, in the 1960s and 1970s, interior design transitioned into a 'postmodern' phase which occurred after a crisis in design brought about by the prevailing dominance of mass culture.<sup>122</sup> Sparke notes that a more pluralistic approach to design in the home was a defining characteristic of the shift from modernism to postmodernism. This pluralistic approach was encapsulated in Mary and Neville Ward's attempt to define the living room in the 1967 Design Centre publication entitled *Living Rooms*:

The living room is the area allocated to those activities which remain uncatered for in any other part of the home and garden [...] the nature and character of such a room arises out of the multiplicity of activities it must sustain and the many moods to which it must respond [...] a living room will only be alive when it not only meets needs but also satisfies desires and reflects personalities; and this means that for a living room there are no rules.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Sparke, *An Introduction to Design and Culture*, 109.

<sup>123</sup> Mary Ward and Neville Ward, *Living Rooms* (Design Centre Publication, 1967), 4. Design Council archives, University of Brighton.

In a similar vein, *Good Housekeeping* explained in 1965 that ‘modern living means that more rooms must cater for the varied interests of the people who use them.’<sup>124</sup> It is reflected too in a more relaxed approach to television’s place in the home, including in relation to the fireplace. For example, this advice about where to put the television set from DIY magazine *Homemaker* in 1965 fused the role of the television and the fireplace into one:

If alternative heating has made the fireplace redundant, take out the fireplace, but instead of blocking up the opening, re-plaster around it and fix a low shelf across to take the television. Then the family can still gather around the chimney breast and keep the room’s traditional focal point.<sup>125</sup>

In this postmodern conception of design, the moralistic approach to ‘good design’ disseminated by the CoID, which hoped to promote social democracy, was replaced by a different taste matrix, dictated by consumer choices. The traditional fireplace under modernism was perceived as an anachronistic reminder of the past, in the postmodern conception of design, it no longer served to threaten the commitment to the future, and could co-exist more peacefully with the television set. The highly prescriptive model of the flexible, modern television living space offered by designers, magazines and exhibitions failed to meet the needs of television owners and householders by not taking into account the multiple needs of modern living, which were both practical and sentimental. The retention of traditional forms of living, symbolised by the fireplace, showed that the lived reality of domesticating television already involved in embracing a pluralistic approach to modern living.

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<sup>124</sup> Anon, “Design in your home,” *Good Housekeeping* (June 1965), 42.

<sup>125</sup> Anon, “What will you do, as the old adverts used to say, during the long winter evenings?,” *Homemaker* (December 1969), 81.

## CONCLUSION

In the episode of *Hancock's Half Hour*, previously discussed, at the end of the episode, having eaten and drunk their way through the couple's supplies, eschewing the polite conventions of the household employee, Hancock and Sid fall asleep. As they sleep, burglars steal the entire contents of the home, revealing that the embedded home is a façade; even the well-hidden television set was found and taken. Hancock and Sid's entry into the home of Mr and Mrs Frobisher serves both to expose the pretentiousness of the couple's middle class lifestyle, but it also serves as a threat to their security, which is manifested through the burglary skit in a figurative and literal sense. Much to the horror of Mrs Frobisher, Hancock and Sid bring over their own old-fashioned, down-at-heel furniture for the couple to use. This finale brings into sharp relief the difference between the lifestyles of the working class and the middle class, which were expressed through the use of design and technology in this period. The episode is making fun of the lifestyle of the middle class and the pretensions involved in its design. Hancock and Sid's inability to work the features of the home highlights a class divide in the design of the home; they do not yet have the skills to 'use' the new features. Their intrusion into the home exposes the veneers employed by the contemporary design: Sid is able to sniff out the hidden drinks cabinet, effectively seeing through the façade hiding their extensive drinks selection. The system for hiding the television eventually jams, encasing the television inside the wall, exposing the vulnerability of the automatic home. In addition to this, Hancock is unable to find a way to sit comfortably in any of the modern chairs. The design of the home is contradictory; the control panel is geared towards providing the optimum comfort through central heating and ventilation, yet the chairs exhibit a case of style over substance. In this chapter, we have seen how, in a similar fashion, the flexible model created for domesticating the television set, which was aligned to modernist ideas about streamlined, technology-driven living, was not as practical and efficient as it appeared on paper.

This chapter asked the question what does the domestication of television in Britain tell us about the role that television played in re-shaping constructions of domestic space? It considered both how television as a material object had to be integrated into the existing material culture of the home and how the material culture of the home had to adapt to the arrival of television. Television entered into the home at a particular juncture in the life of the home, when a specific, modernist agenda was shaping ideas about how homes should look and function. Television re-shaped domestic space by placing unprecedented pressure on living space, which led to fears that television would come to dominate the home, precluding any other activities taking place. The response to these anxieties was to construct a flexible, modern living space, which allowed for television alongside the other activities that might need to take place. This was relational to other objects and technologies, such as furnishing, lighting and storage units. Furthermore, in order to show that television was not the primary activity in the household, television owners were frequently advised to place their receivers near other objects of leisure, including books, drinks cabinets and record players. According to this model, it was best to try to diminish the presence of the television receiver through its physical positioning in the room. We have seen how this construction of ‘flexible modernity’ was aligned with dominant, middle class masculine ideas about domesticity, which excluded more traditional tastes, which were perceived to be feminised and working class. A *lived* reality of ‘flexible modernity’ emerged around the television set, whereby households accommodated the medium on their own terms, finding multiple ways to situate it into the existing material culture of their homes. These decisions were often based on sentimentality and practicality, which meant that householders were keen to retain formal or traditional elements of the home. A key example of this is the retention of the fireplace, which many designers believed should be removed once obsolete. As the modernist creed gave way to postmodernism, which was, by its nature, more pluralistic, the construct of the flexible living space became less prescriptive. Living space was

organised around the concept of the inhabitant's tastes and needs, rather than a prescriptive model of a singular 'ideal' living space.

However, the legacy of television's domestication remains pertinent; the anxieties about television's dominance continue to shape the discourse around television and its many physical forms, and the need to disguise or diminish the television set(s) endure. In 2016, the debate re-emerged after BBC presenter Justin Webb revealed he bought a 65-inch television, despite his wife's disapproval. An article on etiquette in the *Daily Mail* stated that one should never own a large television because 'television is a downmarket medium' and that owning 'something that is so ginormous in order to watch something that is already pretty downmarket is even more downmarket than the medium itself.'<sup>126</sup> *The Guardian* newspaper joined the debate with an article entitled 'the dos and don'ts of buying a huge TV,' which concluded that televisions 'are fine in a living room unless they are competing with another focal point, such as a fireplace.'<sup>127</sup> It would appear that remnants of the nearly seven-decade-old debate continue to persist.

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<sup>126</sup> William Hanson, "What does your home say about your social class?" *MailOnline* (18 April 2016). <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3542287/Etiquette-expert-reveals-12-items-never-including-coasters-big-screen-TV-hot-tub.html>, accessed 07/01/18.

<sup>127</sup> Stephen Moss, "The dos and don'ts of buying a huge TV," *The Guardian* (19 April 2016). <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2016/apr/19/dos-and-donts-of-buying-huge-tv-justin-webb>, accessed 07/01/18.

# CHAPTER 5. THE COMFORTABLE TELEVISION

## LIFESTYLE

### INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter argued that the domestication of television was dependent upon the construction of a flexible living space around the material object of the television set. Reliant on other objects and furnishings, the flexible television living space ensured that television did not dominate the home, preventing other activities from taking place. This chapter will further develop analysis of how the television set was domesticated, by continuing to examine how the material place of the television set within the home was conceptualised in post-war British culture, including lifestyle magazines, design publications, trade fairs, and exhibitions. It will contend that, concurrent to the creation of the flexible television living space, an ideal television lifestyle emerged, which was based on achieving optimal comfort while viewing television.

Initially, the comfortable television lifestyle centred around the connection between comfort and health, whereby watching television in comfort avoided unhealthy viewing practices, which might be harmful to viewers in some way. As with the flexible living space, healthy, comfortable viewing was achieved through the material culture around the television set, including furniture and objects. However, it was utilities – gas and electricity – that were most integral to the television lifestyle, as these could give the feeling of comfort in the home, particularly through the provision of heating. Over the course of the 1950s, the association between comfort and health diminished and comfort was conceptualised as something that could be consumed, through the purchase of particular products, including those powered by gas and electricity. As a result, the comfortable television lifestyle became increasingly

commodified. This happened in two ways. Firstly, the way to achieve optimum viewing conditions rested on consuming certain commodities. These products were often specifically designed to enhance television viewing, creating a unique material culture around the television set. Secondly, the television lifestyle became a visual motif used in marketing material to sell the products that could provide comfort in the home. This commodified articulation of the comfortable television lifestyle was framed as dependent on the labour of women, who were frequently targeted as the facilitators of comfort, through their role as consumers and housewives.

The vital role of women in the domestication of television has already been recognised by a variety of scholars, who have identified that the complexity of division of labour in the home was integral to women's experience of television.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will offer another aspect to this discussion by considering how women were expected to facilitate the environment around television viewing and how they were specifically targeted in the construction of the television lifestyle in their role as providers and consumers. The construction of the viewing environment, in a British context, has received less academic attention, which is why this chapter continues to focus on the television as a material object situated within the physical environment of the home. In his work on the domestication of television, Tim O'Sullivan has already acknowledged the need to examine the television lifestyle:

A concern with television lifestyle starts with the materiality of how television appears and is indexed, prioritized and used in the actual domestic culture; how it occupies a space (or in fact multiple 'spaces') in the private situation and related household settings [...] what the 'television' looks like, where it is positioned, and how it is used, regarded and assimilated into particular everyday routines and relationships,

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1: Literature Review.

connecting and interfacing private territories and the dynamics of lifestyles, with public and mediated forms of cultural circulation.<sup>2</sup>

While O’Sullivan recognised the need to examine these various aspects of how television’s place within domesticity formed a lifestyle, or a way of life around television, there are still identifiable gaps in the literature on television’s domestication in Britain.<sup>3</sup> This chapter intends to focus on the ‘materiality of how television appears’ in relation to other technologies and utilities shaping the home in the post-war period. In the post-war British home, technology and utilities brought improvements, which made the home a more comfortable place to be, while increasing leisure time meant more time was spent in the home. Television was one of many technologies which re-shaped the British home in the decades following the Second World War. This chapter will position the material history of television in relation to the other technologies and utilities shaping the home, showing that television’s place in the home was relational rather than absolute. Television should not be understood in isolation from the attendant technologies in the home, without which television’s development would not have been possible.

The development of a television lifestyle was part of a wider trend, whereby the presentation of a person or family’s lifestyle became a vital means of expressing identity. In her work on consumer culture, Celia Lury writes that:

As a member of a particular lifestyle grouping, the individual actively uses consumer goods – clothes, the home, furnishings, interior décor, car, holidays, food and drink, as

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<sup>2</sup> Tim O’Sullivan, “Researching the Viewing Culture: Television and the Home 1946-60” in *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*, ed. Helen Wheatley (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 22.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 1: Literature Review.

well as cultural goods, such as music, film and art – in ways which indicate that grouping's taste or sense of style.<sup>4</sup>

This shift, therefore, has to be understood as intrinsically connected to consumer culture; the consumable leisure-based lifestyle was put on show in the form of advertisements, television programmes and magazine articles. Television's relationship to this burgeoning consumer culture has primarily been understood in terms of the creation of commercial television in 1955, when advertisements could be shown on television for the first time.<sup>5</sup> However, this chapter will build on the previous section of the thesis to further demonstrate that television's relationship to consumer culture was more multifaceted and preceded the advent of ITV. Many of the examples which will be used in this chapter indicate that the visual motif of television was utilised as an advertising tool before it was possible to advertise on the medium itself. It is apparent that the potential of television to sell a desirable lifestyle was quickly capitalised upon by advertisers.

The first section will show that the television lifestyle was initially based around achieving optimal, healthy viewing conditions, which could be attained through lighting and heating. The connections between technology, health and comfort were social ideals of the twentieth century, which were then applied to television viewing. The second section will examine how the television lifestyle was quickly commodified. Rather than a focus on health, comfortable viewing became associated with certain consumer practices. Television owners were encouraged to purchase specific commodities, which were designed to enhance viewing. As a result of this, a unique material culture emerged around the television set, which aimed to create an ideal television viewing environment. In addition to this, it will become apparent that

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<sup>4</sup> Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 80.

<sup>5</sup> Rob Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture: Britain and the Transformation of Modernity* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

television soon took on a symbolic resonance in the idealization of the home in this period, becoming a visual motif for comfort and leisure. Television, as a technology powered by electricity and a provider of leisure within the home, became an apt symbol for modern domesticity. The visual motif of television appeared across a wide variety of advertisements and articles promoting comfort in the home through the purchase of consumer goods, such as boilers, fireplaces and carpets. These presented the television lifestyle as dependent upon consuming specific products, thus embedding television's image within consumer culture. Finally, the third section will demonstrate that the consumption practices associated with achieving the comfortable television lifestyle were frequently constructed around prevailing ideas about gender. Optimum comfort was framed as a means of distinguishing the home, and usually it was the female figure who was tasked with ensuring that comfort was achieved. Behind the constructed ideal of the television lifestyle was a reality predicated on gendered labour division within the home, which was reinforced in magazines and advertisements.

#### METHODOLOGY

This chapter will, for the most part, rely on material from lifestyle magazines, including articles and advertisements. Lifestyle magazines reveal the idealised constructions of home, providing visual and written representations of how it should look and be used. Advertisements frame the relationship between the home and consumption; they imagine domesticity through the lens of consumer culture. In the 1950s, as consumer goods flooded the market after years of austerity, the connection between home and consumer culture became increasingly heightened. Indeed, lifestyle magazines played a key role in educating consumers, particularly women, in how to maintain the home and how to navigate this new market of consumable goods.<sup>6</sup> The magazines frequently featured articles about the new appliances like cookers and refrigerators, advising on the benefits of using gas or electrical appliances, thus they played an important role in how

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<sup>6</sup> Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* (New York: Pandora Press, 1987), 43.

consumer culture was navigated. This research has centred on lifestyle magazines. This includes monthly magazines with a domestic focus such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Ideal Home*, which are predominantly aimed at a middle class, female readership. Weekly magazines such as *Woman* and *Woman's Own*, which had a much wider readership, that extended across classes, though aimed at women, and DIY magazines *Practical Householder* and *Homemaker*, which speak to a middle and lower middle class, male readership.<sup>7</sup> The source material, therefore, can, to some extent, be differentiated by class and gender and the discourse and visual material present in each must be understood within the context of the kind of readership the magazine aimed to appeal to.

I have traced the ways in which the image of the television set or television viewing appeared across them. The appearance of television in relation to gas, electricity, heating and lighting emerged as a dominant mode of representation. It was quickly apparent that these connections were made most frequently in advertisements, often for products that related to the comfort of the home, such as heating devices, lighting and carpets, thus a high proportion of the sources discussed are adverts. Visual connections between gas, electricity and television were also made in features relating to how to heat and light the home, such as special supplements in the magazines on what kind of heating to invest in.

Further to the magazines, this article will uncover the other spaces in which meanings of home were being formed in this period to understand if the magazines were producing widely held beliefs about what constituted a comfortable home and the place of television within this. The Council of Industrial Design (CoID) produced literature, articles and exhibitions on the place of television in the home, which provided advice on how to achieve comfortable viewing, with a focus on how to light television viewing. This provides insight into how designers formulated

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<sup>7</sup> See introduction.

the relationship between television and other objects in the home. Like the magazines, these again give us a top-down account and help us to understand how a pervasive, middle class construction of television's place in the home was framed.

I will also use government reports on house building and social surveys, including studies of homes across Britain conducted by social scientist Dennis Chapman in the 1940s and 50s. These illustrate how the discussion about comfort was taking place across different platforms, not just in magazines, and that this was often in relation to the design and architecture of the modern home. In addition to this, I will refer to the two Mass Observation (MO) directives from 1949 and 2003 respectively, which I have used throughout the thesis. In this instance, they provide insight into the hopes, concerns and fears that some members of the public had, or remember having, about television and its impact on their domestic lives. In particular, they have proved illuminating for how television was discussed in relation to the viewing environment and comfort.

## COMFORTABLE VIEWING PRACTICES

As with the previous chapter, changes to housing in the post-war period are an important contextual factor; they can help explain the origins of how the domestication of television become intertwined with the concept of comfort. The previous chapter showed how changes to ideas about how homes should look and function helped to shape the flexible television living space. In addition to changes in design and architecture, post-war homes were also built to be comfortable spaces to live in, which was dependent, to a large extent, on utilities and technologies. In part, the need for a comfortable home arose from the fact that the domestic sphere was becoming increasingly central to both men and women's lives, as working hours became shorter and there was more time to spend at home. As a result, home was conceptualised as a place of leisure. This was a change that was propounded by the arrival of

television, as another form of leisure was brought into the home. It is important to recognise, however, that the shift towards the leisure-focused home was also necessary for television's success. The comfortable, leisure-based home was an environment in which a medium like television could flourish. This section will examine how the idea of the comfortable home developed and how television became part of it. It will look at how the conception of comfort was initially connected to health and how the advice about comfortable television viewing grew out of this. It will argue that this laid the foundation for an idealised television lifestyle based on comfort.

#### THE COMFORTABLE, HEALTHY MODERN HOME

Historians have argued that the concept of the comfortable home emerged in the Victorian era; the comfortable, 'bourgeois,' private home was formed as an escape from the increasingly bureaucratic, cold sphere of work.<sup>8</sup> Developments in technology, including the domestication of electricity and the use of gas fires, aided the modernisation of the home in the twentieth century, providing opportunities for better heated and better lit homes. David Jeremiah writes that the Victorian legacy of comfort led to an 'overriding agenda to provide a better life, sustained by a belief in the objectives of progress and improvement, which through planning and technical change would put in place a modern Britain.'<sup>9</sup> In the 1920s and 30s the benefits of gas and electricity in providing a more comfortable home were widely promoted, with various exhibitions, leaflets, posters and lectures produced educating the public about the advantages of these utilities.<sup>10</sup> The early conceptions of the clean, light, healthy home from the 1920s and 30s are an important context to how the television lifestyle was constructed. Much of the promotion of gas and electricity rested on their ability to make the home healthier. A leaflet produced by the British Electrical Developmental Association in 1934 promoted the

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<sup>8</sup> Witold Rybcynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), 1987.

<sup>9</sup> David Jeremiah, *Architecture and Design for the Family in Britain, 1900-1970* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah, *Architecture and Design for the Family in Britain*, 98.

various uses of electricity, stating that the ‘electric home is bright, clean, healthy and cheerful.’<sup>11</sup> Thus, the concepts of comfort and health were entwined, as comfort was conceived as the absence of that which might cause pain or damage health. This resonated into the post-war period. In 1958, an article about health in the home called ‘doctor in the house’ in *Ideal Home* explained that ‘an ill-planned, ill-equipped, careless home can lead to physical sickness and those murky complaints of our day – boredom, a sense of futility, “nerves,” “neuroses.”’<sup>12</sup>

While many of the ideals about the comfortable, warm, hygienic home were laid down in the 1920s and 30s, the post-war period was a decisive moment in the improvement in living conditions and unprecedented access to comfort. This created the ideal conditions for television to thrive. In the period of post-war reconstruction, millions of new homes were built and slums cleared across the country meaning that millions had access to a new standard of living, which for many meant the first time with indoor plumbing and running water.<sup>13</sup> In 1947 and 1949 respectively, electricity and gas were nationalised (coinciding with the creation of the welfare state), pivotal acts that changed these from commodities for the wealthy into state-run services intended for everyone. The end of post-war austerity, full employment, and the prevalence of Hire Purchase in the mid-1950s meant that there was increased spending power with which to buy new gas and electricity powered goods. Many of these devices were so-called labour saving; they were sold on the premise that they would decrease time spent working in the home, especially for women, and increase time spent on leisure activities. Whether these devices decreased women’s time working in the home is contested, but declining working hours in other workplaces did create more leisure time, all of which contributed to a growing focus on

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<sup>11</sup> “Plenty of Time for Play,” Electrical Development Association, leaflet (1934), 36. Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester. EDA1247.

<sup>12</sup> Anon, “Doctor in the house,” *Ideal Home* (September 1958), 38.

<sup>13</sup> Claire Langhamer, “The Meanings of Home in Post-War Britain,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005), 341-362.

the home as the centre of family life.<sup>14</sup> The growth of suburbanisation put people out of reach from non-domestic forms of entertainment, making forms of entertainment within the home increasingly popular.<sup>15</sup> It is out of this context that it was possible for television to grow into a mass medium, present in millions of homes. Social survey pioneer Mark Abrams wrote in *The Listener* in 1959:

For the first time in modern British history the working class home, as well as the middle class home, has become a place that is warm, comfortable, and able to provide its own fireside entertainment – in fact, pleasant to live in.<sup>16</sup>

The fireside entertainment that Abrams refers to could include radio or television, as, from the 1930s onwards, leisure in the home was increasingly provided by broadcasting. Indeed, broadcasting was another utility flowing into the post-war home, domesticating the experience of modernity through its reshaping of the boundary between the public and private spheres. Like the newly nationalised gas and electricity, broadcasting was a public service, conceived of as accessible to all, but for the price of the licence fee. Television became a defining feature of the post-war home, bringing visual as well as audio information and entertainment directly into the home, and it soon became the main way in which many Britons chose to spend their increased leisure hours.<sup>17</sup>

Utilities like gas and electricity revolutionised the possibilities for warmth within the home, but the spread of suitable heating was uneven across the twentieth century, creating a great divide between homes. Many homes still did not have indoor bathrooms or running hot water

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<sup>14</sup> See Ruth Schwartz Cohen, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (SI: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>15</sup> Roger Silverstone, ed., *Visions of Suburbia* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Langhamer, “The Meanings of Home in Post-War Britain,” 341.

<sup>17</sup> Tise Vahimagi, “TV in the 1950s,” ScreenOnline, online resource (2014), <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1321302/>, accessed 26 September 2016.

until the 1970s, let alone central heating. However, the amenities of the comfortable home, in theory, came to be considered basic components of the home, rather than luxuries, by the beginning of the 1960s, including running water, gas or electric powered heating, sufficient lighting, suitable amounts of living space, and broadcasting. In 1961, the Parker Morris Report *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* was published and laid out recommendations for the specifications of the modern home. As with the Tudor Walters Report of 1918 and the Dudley Report of 1944 it represented a landmark in the design of public housing.<sup>18</sup> While the 1944 Dudley Report rarely mentioned central heating, better heating was one of the dominating concerns of the 1961 Report.<sup>19</sup> Heating, the Report wrote, should be a common provision for all, not just the wealthy, in order for the whole dwelling to be properly inhabited.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the Report recommended that there should be 15-20 electrical sockets per house, rather than the average of 6 found in new houses at the time to accommodate the increasing numbers of electrical products in the home.<sup>21</sup> Thus, technology and the comfort it could provide were becoming prerequisites of the modern home and a new standard of living was laid down. The following section will demonstrate that it was from this relationship between health, utilities and domesticity that the concept of the comfortable television lifestyle formed.

#### ACHIEVING OPTIMAL VIEWING CONDITIONS

The early conceptions of a comfortable television lifestyle grew out of the equation between comfort and health. Lifestyle magazines and design publications provided viewing advice that aimed to prevent any damage to health and thus create comfort. This included instructions on how to avoid eye strain with correct lighting and viewing distances, as well as on correct height of seats and neck tilt to avoid neck strain. In 1961, *Ideal Home* explained to its readers, when

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<sup>18</sup> John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing: 1815-1985* (London: Methuen, 1986), 304.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 299-306.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 306.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 307.

watching television, ‘viewing comfort is as important as the picture.’<sup>22</sup> This comfort was largely achieved through the correct application of other utilities in the home, namely gas and electricity. One feature in *Ideal Home* in 1955 was entitled ‘furnishing in relation to lighting, heating and television’;<sup>23</sup> the connection between these three technologies was instrumental to the domestication of television.

Television, as a visual medium which gave out a large amount of light, could alter the balance of light within the home, potentially upsetting the ideal sensorial conditions. Previous media devices in the home, such as the radio and gramophone, altered primarily the soundscape, meaning the television had its own set of uncharted potential problems to be resolved. Fears emerged that television could damage eyesight and thus negatively impact on the health of viewers. Responses to the 1949 MO directive indicate that there were concerns about eye strain, including one respondent who stated that she has ‘heard of the American tele-eye.’<sup>24</sup> Memories of television given in the 2003 MO directive also refer to fears about eyesight in relation to television viewing, especially for those who were children when they first encountered television. Several responses recall that television viewing was restricted because it might cause damage to the eyes, with one reference to the colloquial expression ‘square eyes.’<sup>25</sup> In the article ‘how to live with television’ from *Good Housekeeping* in 1952, the anxiety that ‘it is harmful to the eyes’ was listed as the top charge laid against television.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Anon, “The Two Sides of TV,” *Ideal Home* (November 1961), 66.

<sup>23</sup> Anon, “Furnishing in relation to lighting, heating and television,” *Ideal Home* (October 1955), 96.

<sup>24</sup> 1016, “Television,” directive questionnaire (M-O February 1949). M-OA, University of Sussex. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Mass Observation Online, <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/DirectiveQuestionnaire-1949feb> [Accessed July 03, 2017].

<sup>25</sup> M2986, “Images of the 1950s and 60s,” directive questionnaire (M-O Spring 2003). MO-A, University of Sussex, sxmoa2/1/69/1/1’

<sup>26</sup> C.A. Lejeune, “How to live with television,” *Good Housekeeping* (September 1952), 37-38.

The fears about eye strain were taken seriously and as a result there were collaborations between designers, magazines and medical professionals to ensure that television viewing was ‘safe.’ In the previous chapter, lighting aided the flexible living space by allowing multiple activities to take place alongside television viewing, but it was also advocated as a vital means to achieving comfortable viewing, as it was seen to prevent eye strain and glare from the screen. Lighting, alongside correct viewing distances, were seen as key to comfortable viewing. The above-mentioned article told readers that television was not harmful to the eyes so long as it was not viewed in total darkness, or from too near or too far.<sup>27</sup> An early article from *Ideal Home* offered similar advice:

A fair amount of room light is desirable when looking in. Set and lighting should be placed so that the light does not fall directly on the screen and so that the screen does not reflect lamps or fires [...] At night, a standard lamp can be placed to one side of the set.<sup>28</sup>

Articles suggested placing a light behind the screen to ‘prevent visual fatigue when watching TV.’<sup>29</sup> In 1960, DIY magazine *Homemaker* told readers that ‘television is best viewed in subdued light, and this is usually supplied by the spill of light from other fittings.’<sup>30</sup> The use of a lamp while viewing was a means to reduce ‘glare,’ which was seen as the culprit behind eye strain. In the aforementioned *Ideal Home* feature ‘doctor in the house,’ Dr Dennis Rockland explained to readers that ‘any glare or any considerable contrast in lighting is bad. Quite rapidly it produces eye fatigue, which may lead to headaches and that sort of thing.’<sup>31</sup> In 1962, *Ideal*

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>28</sup> Roy Norris, “Decision on Television,” *Ideal Home* (May 1949), 29.

<sup>29</sup> Anon, “With a view to television,” *Ideal Home* (March 1954), 54.

<sup>30</sup> Anon, “The right light for the room,” *Homemaker* (November 1960), 1334.

<sup>31</sup> Anon, “Doctor in the house,” 38.

*Home* again took counsel from a medical source, this time an optical expert, to proffer advice about ‘your eyes and television.’ The optical expert told readers:

Look around at your lighting. Never switch it off completely; that will tire your eyes more quickly than anything else. Don’t put a lamp on top of the set or in a position where it is reflected in the screen. Have lighting to the side of your head, slightly to the rear. Or overhead, again to the rear. Or both. In other words, make sure you have lighting that’s practically normal.<sup>32</sup>

The advice extended to the height of the screen in relation to the viewer and the position of their chair: ‘if you sit in an upright chair and look along a line of sight that goes slightly downward, you’re right.’<sup>33</sup> It goes onto explain that if you still get eye problems, after obtaining correct lighting and viewing distance, then it is advisable to get an eye check. Comfortable television viewing, therefore, was a health matter, but when correctly applied, there was no need for concern.

A concerted effort to ensure correct lighting and viewing distances was instigated by the CoID, whose 1957 exhibition on television’s place in the home – ‘Design for Viewing’ – used four room designs from designers to show how to view television. The designers, Geoffrey Salmon and Natasha Kroll, produced four designs between them, for families of different sizes and budgets, which were then put on display at the exhibition. The room designs followed modernist principles and adhered to the flexible model of arranging the television, which was explored in the previous chapter. For the purposes of this chapter, the room designs are pertinent because of the emphasis on viewing comfort and its dependence upon other

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<sup>32</sup> Anon, “Your eyes and television,” *Ideal Home* (September 1962), 83.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

technologies, namely lighting. This was a concerted effort on the part of the CoID, who even consulted an ophthalmologist to obtain the ideal viewing conditions. In their monthly magazine *Design*, the ophthalmologist's recommendations were laid out in seven 'points for comfortable viewing':

1. Have your set at the right height. If you sit with your head upright, then the screen centre should be the same height above the floor as your eyes. If you lean back, then the set will need to be higher.
2. Sit at the right distance from the screen. The best distance is 6-8 times the nominal screen size [...]
3. Do not sit too far to the side. Not more than 40 degrees from the centre line.
4. Place the set so that reflections of windows, artificial lights or the fire do not appear on the screen.
5. Avoid glare. Do not view in total darkness. The contrast between the bright screen and dark background leads to glare. See that the wall behind is moderately lit. A light-toned, screen-surround also helps to reduce glare.
6. See that your set is properly tuned and maintained. Unsteady or ill-defined pictures tire the eyes.
7. Warm the room properly. Good all-over warmth in the room enables you to make full use of the available viewing area.<sup>34</sup>

These seven points rely on the relationality between furniture position, lighting and heating, which, when correct, created comfortable viewing. The ideal television lifestyle, therefore, was contingent upon the other technologies, utilities and objects in the living space.

Furthermore, the application of these objects and technologies was not understood to be random, but the result of careful consideration by experts. The BBC Written Archives contain hand-drawn pictures, which were sent by the CoID in relation to the exhibition, demonstrating how the direction of lighting and sight lines was worked out (see Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2).

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<sup>34</sup> J.E.B. "The Design Centre's First Year," *Design* 100 (April 1957), 43. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton.

Printed diagrams of the designers' room designs were also produced, depicting the rationale behind the layout of the rooms in relation to the television set (see Figure 5.3). The placing of the television set, therefore, was treated with a scientific and precise rationale, echoing the modernist creed of Le Corbusier that the house is 'a machine for living in.'<sup>35</sup> It belongs to a longer tradition too, of how technologies have been applied as a means of achieving comfortable, healthy homes; electric lighting, since the late nineteenth century, had been framed to consumers as a means of achieving a healthy, as well as an aesthetically-pleasing, home.<sup>36</sup> More concurrent studies in the 1940s also resonate, such as the lighting survey conducted by Dennis Chapman, who measured lighting levels across different social groupings, assessing if it was sufficient for the tasks that take place within the home.<sup>37</sup> This shows the levels of care which were put into researching the optimum lighting conditions in the home. Achieving comfort, therefore, was a social and scientific endeavour, rather than a solely aesthetic one, which was reliant on the correct application of technologies such as lighting.

What marks out the 'Design for Viewing' exhibition as unusual is that the content of the exhibition was accessible in a variety of ways: it was on show at the CoID Design Centre in Piccadilly, London, the BBC produced a live television broadcast from the exhibition, and articles about the exhibition featured in several magazines, including *Design* and *Ideal Home*. It was arguably one of the most wide-reaching efforts to educate television owners on how to view television and how to do so in comfort.<sup>38</sup> The outside broadcast of the exhibition on the BBC was deemed a success by Bill Wright from the Outside Broadcast Department at the BBC

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<sup>35</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (New York: Dover Publication, 1986), 107. The original French paper *Vers Une Architecture* was published in 1927.

<sup>36</sup> Graeme Gooday, *Domesticating Electricity: Technology, Uncertainty and Gender 1880-1914* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Dennis Chapman, "Lighting of Dwellings," *New Series* 24 (London: Wartime Social Survey, 1943).

<sup>38</sup> The CoID annual report from 1957 states that the Design Centre received 720,000 visitors in the eleven months under review and over 2,300 visitors a day (Council of Industrial Design, *12<sup>th</sup> Annual Report* (1957), 8. Design Council archives, University of Brighton.

who wrote to the CoID to say that ‘several viewers that I know have been busily re-organising their rooms, to get the right lighting conditions etc.’<sup>39</sup>



Figure 5.1: Diagram from ‘Design for Viewing,’ 1957, BBC WAC

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<sup>39</sup> Bill Wright (BBC) to J. Noel Wright (CoID), letter (13 March 1957). BBC WAC, “Design for Viewing,” T32/891/1.

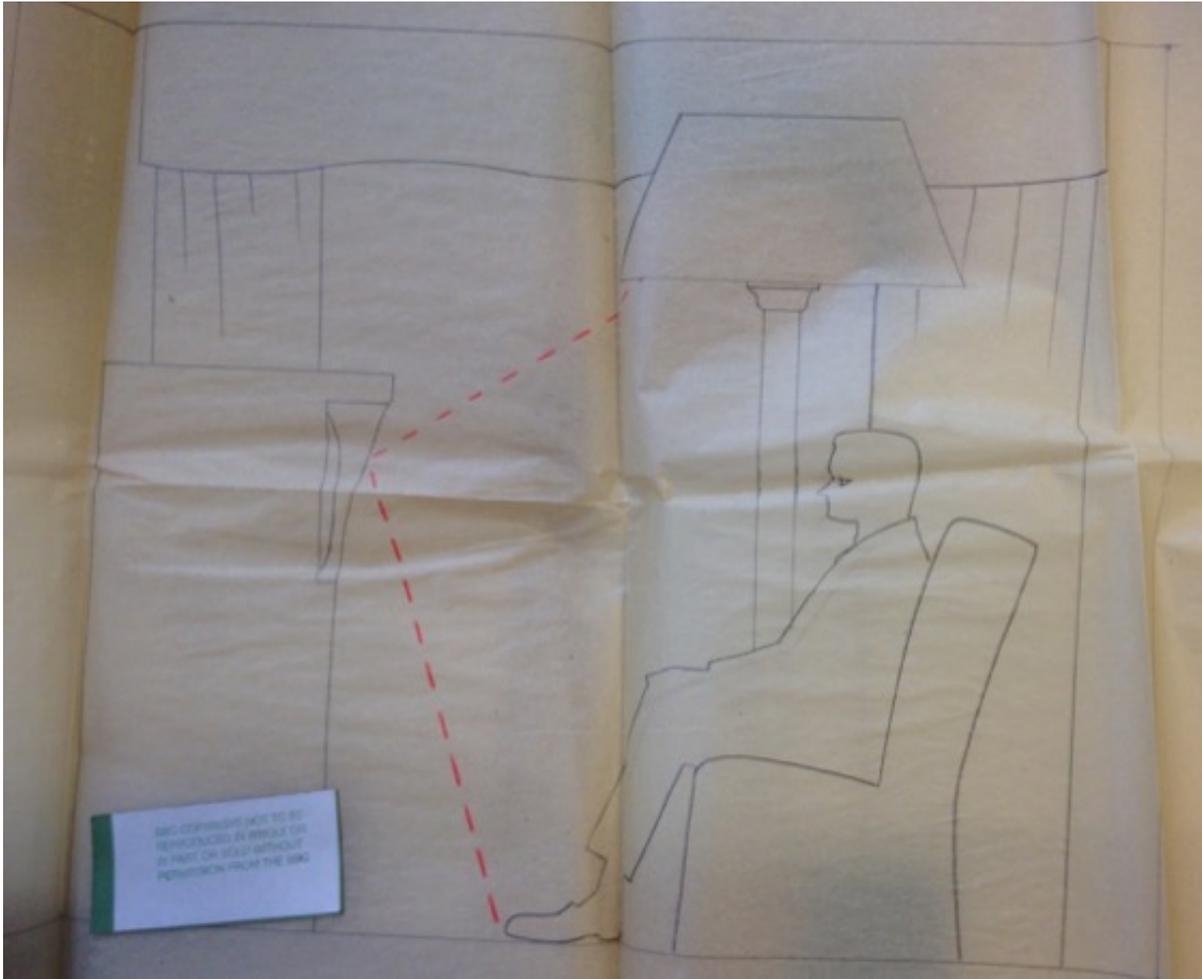


Figure 5.2: Diagram from 'Design for Viewing,' 1957, BBC WAC

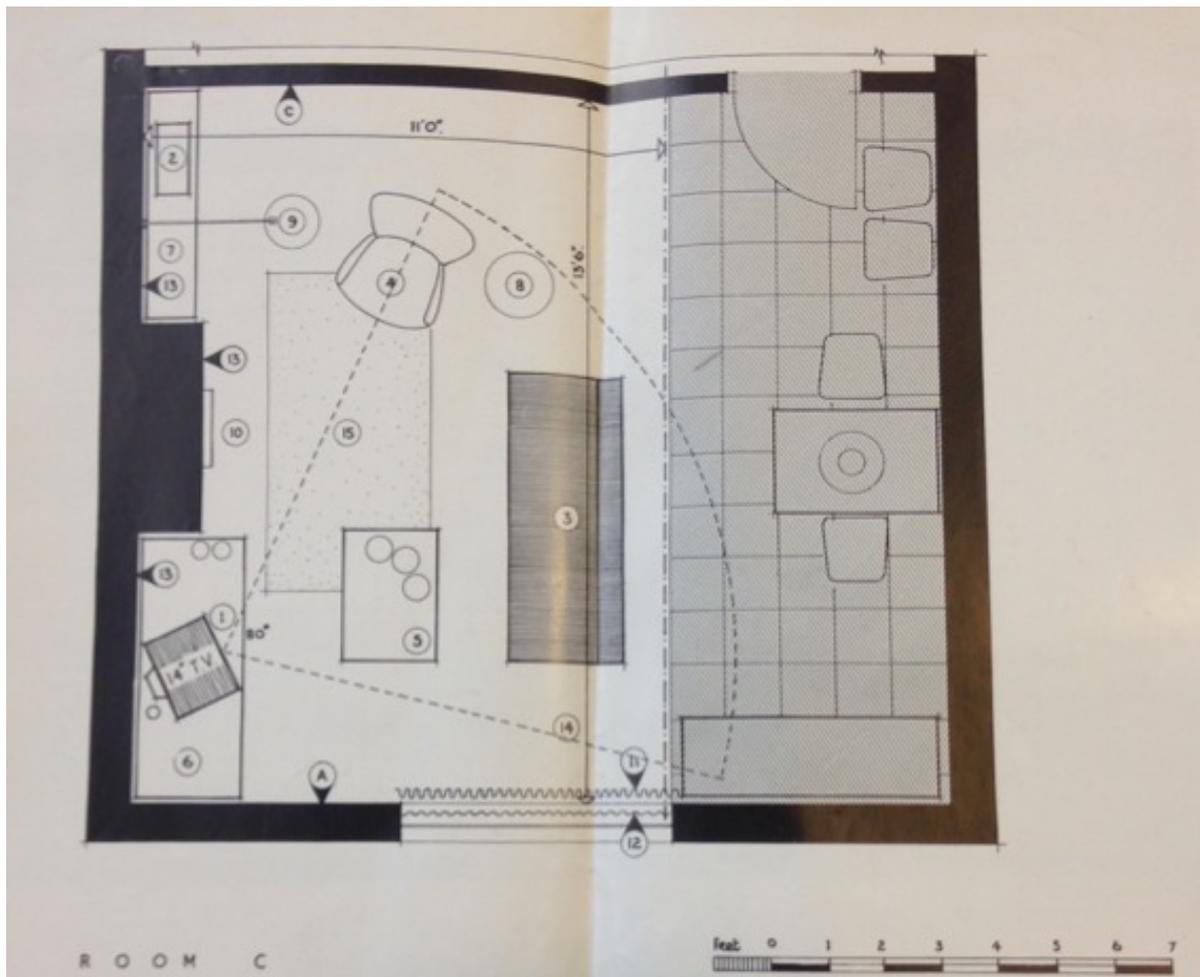


Figure 5.3: Diagram from 'Design for Viewing,' 1957, BBC WAC

In the seven-point guide to comfortable viewing quoted above, the seventh point advises householders to 'warm the room properly.' Comfortable television viewing was also dependent upon the adequate provision of heating, whether from a wood, coal, gas, or electric fire. As with lighting, this aspect of comfort was provided by utilities. The previous chapter showed how, initially, the position of the television set was dependent upon the fireplace, as this was the primary means of achieving warmth while viewing. This is an example of how the need for comfort exceeded that for a more practical physical arrangement of furniture. One response to the 1949 MO directive shows how one household rearranged their domestic set-up to ensure comfort while viewing their new television set:

We used to sit and enjoy another room in the house. Since Kenneth fixed his set in the room with radiogram, piano and parquet floor, our very comfortable room seems to be losing all its furniture to this one! Even the fire grate has rolled (literally, because it runs on two wheels) into this one.<sup>40</sup>

Achieving warmth while viewing was easier once central heating was installed, which allowed greater movement around the television set, but this form of heating did not become commonplace in British home until the 1970s.<sup>41</sup> Magazines frequently promoted different methods of heating the home, providing advice about the different methods and the new devices on the market. Within this, a visual association was created between heating and the television, with images of television sets often featuring in articles about heating, such as this *Homes and Gardens* special feature on heating from 1963 (see Figure 5.4). A feature from *Ideal Home* entitled ‘warmth from wall and ceiling’ presented an all-electric flat in Chelsea, where the television set sits on a shelf above an Ecko ‘Thermopanel,’ which was a wall-mounted heating panel. It explains:

The Thermopanel heater is on the opposition wall under the canti-levered shelf carrying the television set. It is made of tough non-reflecting armour plate glass which shows neither smears nor finger marks. The elements are embedded in the glass and the low conductivity of the surface prevents any risk of burns from momentary contact with it. A pilot lamp glows when the heater is on and provides subdued lighting for television viewing.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> 1046, “Television.”

<sup>41</sup> Ben Highmore, *The Great Indoors: At Home in the Modern British House* (Profile Books: London 2014).

<sup>42</sup> Anon, “Warmth from wall and ceiling,” *Ideal Home* (October 1958), 71.

In this instance, the heater provides both warmth for television viewing but also the right lighting for it. There is a clear correlation between the electrical heating units and the activity of television viewing, both in their close physical proximity and in the sensation of warmth that the panels give out.



Figure 5.4: Heating guide, *Homes and Gardens*, October 1963

Ambient temperature depended on ventilation as well as heating. The ‘doctor in the house’ article in *Ideal Home* in 1958 emphasised the need for movement of fresh air through the home, stipulating that ‘if any house and the people in it are to remain healthy and comfortable there must be stream of outdoor flowing through it constantly.’<sup>43</sup> The accompanying image to the article shows a diagram of the airflow in a living room, with a man sitting on a sofa looking at the dual focal point of television and fireplace (see Figure 5.5).

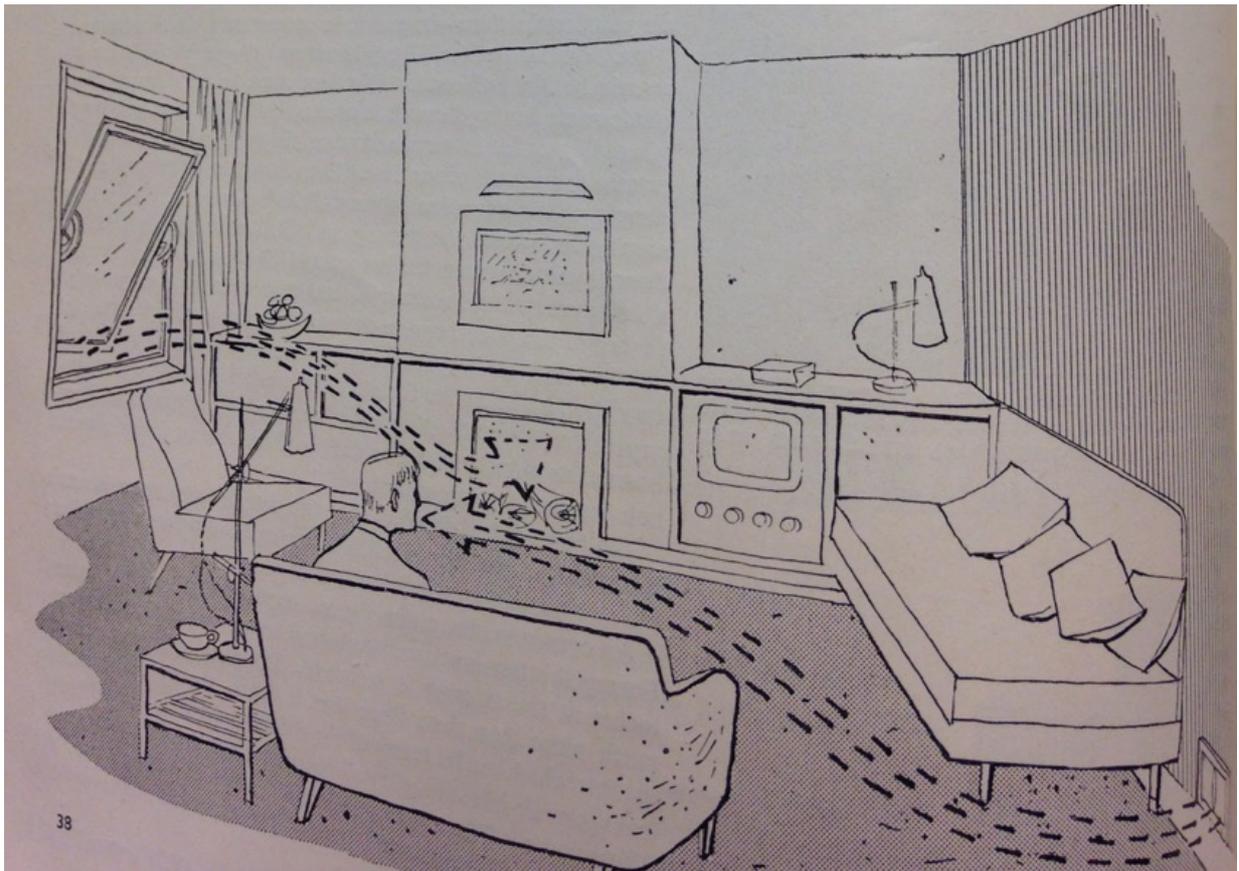


Figure 5.5: “Doctor in the house,” *Ideal Home*, September 1958

To accommodate the seasonal changes in temperature and outdoor air, householders were encouraged to re-arrange their living rooms to ensure maximum comfort. The television was frequently moved from near a heating source in the winter, towards windows in the summer (see Figure 5.6). In 1959, *Good Housekeeping* advised readers to ‘let your home acknowledge the seasons with looks and comforts designed for year-round living.’<sup>44</sup> Designs for a winter

<sup>43</sup> Anon, “Doctor in the House,” 37.

<sup>44</sup> Joan Sturdy, “A swing to summer,” *Good Housekeeping* (June 1959), 56.

and summer living room are shown, with the winter space focusing on ‘television viewing and sewing round the fire,’ while the summer version is ‘more for relaxing by an open window, enjoying a view of the garden.’ It goes on to explain that ‘the television set, with appropriate seating, has been moved to a separate part of the room, where there is less natural daylight, so that it can be viewed without need for the curtains to be drawn.’<sup>45</sup> Such an example fits the flexibility model for accommodating the television set, which the previous chapter examined, but in this instance, the guiding principle behind this flexibility is comfort. The changing seasons meant that comfort in the room was relational to the different temperatures and types of natural light, which, in particular, could alter the experience of viewing television, thus the room was altered accordingly to ensure maximum comfort.



Figure 5.6: “A swing to summer,” *Good Housekeeping*, June 1959

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

As we have seen, the concept of comfort, based around ideas about health, was an organising principle for the home that developed in the Victorian era but became a reality for more households than was previously possible in the post-war period. The healthy, comfortable home was dependent on the widespread availability of utilities like gas and electricity, which provided sufficient lighting and heating. Television's domestication into the British home was centred around comfortable viewing, which focused on ensuring that viewing did not damage the health. Comfortable viewing was achieved through the correct application of lighting and heating; it was dependent on the other utilities and technologies concurrently shaping the home. In this way, a television lifestyle emerged based on the concept of comfort and health and provided by other domestic utilities and technologies.

#### COMMODIFYING THE TELEVISION LIFESTYLE

While the early advice connected gas and electricity to comfortable, warm, healthy television viewing, this relationship was soon capitalised upon by manufacturers and advertisers. In this new equation, comfort was conceptualised as less to do with health, and more to do with a pleasurable, non-strenuous environment, in which a viewer's needs were easily met. A range of products directly related to television viewing, such as television chairs and lights, were manufactured to help to achieve this. The products centred around creating the ideal, easy, comfortable viewing environment. Thus the television lifestyle became consumable through the purchase of these specific commodities. In this way, a unique material culture developed around television aimed at ensuring maximum comfort while viewing. Furthermore, the television lifestyle itself became a means of selling other products that could enhance comfort in the home. For example, television sets or television viewing frequently featured in advertisements for gas and electrical products. The image of the television lifestyle became a visual by-word for leisurely comfort in the home. This visual lexicon was utilised by advertisers as a means to sell a version of the ideal home, which was constructed as relying on

consumer practices. In this way, advertisers gravitated towards television before it was possible to advertise on the medium itself. The creation of commercial television in 1955 is seen to mark the point at which television in Britain's relationship to consumer culture transformed.<sup>46</sup> The appearance of television *in* advertisements for a variety of products shows that television was not only a conduit for transmitting consumer culture. Television's *material form* was used as an advertising tool, suggesting that television's early relationship to consumer culture in Britain was more multifaceted than the creation of commercial television.

#### MATERIAL CULTURE AROUND TELEVISION

There are examples of products that were made specifically for television viewing, which show that a market opened up for television accessories that would directly enhance the experience of watching television. These meant a material culture, made for television viewing, emerged. We can see how these products responded to the fact that television is a visual medium, which unlike radio, must be seen and heard. Lighting, therefore, had to be carefully considered, as did seating arrangement to ensure all viewers could view in comfort. The magazines provided advice on what accessories to buy and how they might aid television viewing, while DIY magazines gave instructions on how to make accessories such as tables and chairs yourself.

The importance of lighting to ideal television viewing has already been established and, as a result, television lights soon became a consumer good designed to sit above the television set. An advertisement for the R.E.A.L. plinth light from *Ideal Home* in 1956 offered a means to achieving the ideal television viewing atmosphere (see Figure 5.7). It reads:

When this restful, mellow and charming light is on the top of your T.V. set, a new era of soothing televiewing is born. No suspicion of eye-strain to mar your

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<sup>46</sup> See Introduction and Chapter 1: Literature Review.

enjoyment; no reflection on your screen, no interference with the brightness of your picture. T.V. at its most perfect! The plinth creates an effect of non-darkness – rather than light – and sheds its softly diffused glow throughout the room.<sup>47</sup>

The light both offered to facilitate perfect viewing, without eye strain or reflections, but also to create the appropriate atmosphere for the room, from the ‘soft glow’ and ‘non-darkness,’ effectively commodifying the feel of television. As much as this advert embellishes the potential of the product, it was very common to place a light above the television set, so it was tapping into an existing design choice. Indeed, in an edition of DIY magazine *Practical Householder* from the same year, a reader passed on advice on how to make your own plinth light using the chromium holder from an oven-proof dish.<sup>48</sup> A respondent to the 2003 MO directive recalled that on their television set they ‘had an electric lamp, representing a ships [sic] wheel with plastic fish in it, on the top’ adding that ‘it was widely believed that this would prevent damage to your eyes!’<sup>49</sup> This commodification of the television lifestyle was often dismissed as being in ‘bad taste’; in a 1950s television programme on design in the home, Kenneth Clark called a television light, in the form of an aquarium, ‘just stupid and pointless.’<sup>50</sup> A response to the 2003 MO directive felt the same way:

a number of horrible TV lights – to stand on top of the ‘box’ were produced – there was a wooden yacht with a parchment shade – the small bulb was concealed in the shade (sail) – another was a ships [sic] wheel with a lamp hidden behind some nautical image.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> “Best thing on your T.V.,” R.E.A.L. Plinth light, advertisement, *Ideal Home* (November 1956), 197.

<sup>48</sup> E.A. Dale, “Television or plinth light,” *Practical Householder* (April/May 1956), 52.

<sup>49</sup> W1388, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

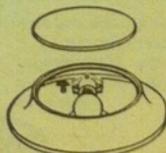
<sup>50</sup> This appears in the BBC2 documentary *All Mod Cons: Ever So Contemporary* (1997, UK: BBC2).

<sup>51</sup> P1637, “Images of the 1950s and 60s.”

Whatever the opinion on the TV light, it is apparent that the desire to prevent eyestrain while viewing and to ensure good health through lighting brought a specific style of lamp into being, creating a unique piece of television-related material culture.



**BEST THING ON YOUR T.V. !  
THE R.E.A.L. PLINTH**



The R.E.A.L. Standard Plinth.  
Dia. at base 11½"

**36/9** tax paid.

When this restful, mellow and charming light is on the top of your T.V. set, a new era of soothing televiewing is born. No suspicion of eye-strain to mar your enjoyment; no reflection on your screen, no interference with the brightness of your picture. T.V. at its most perfect! The Plinth creates an effect of non-darkness—rather than light—and sheds its softly diffused glow throughout the room.

The subtle charm of the Plinth makes it an ideal way of staging floral displays for the decoration of any room, and for the illumination (with low current consumption) of Halls, Corridors and Stairways.

Its classical design and pleasing colours fit in with any type of decoration, and to its well-proven range of shades, we have now added **FOUR NEW CONTEMPORARY TONES** that will give the touch of excellence to the modern room.



The R.E.A.L. Junior Plinth.  
Dia. at base 6½"

**28/-** tax paid.

You can now buy this superbly finished Plinth in either Pastel Cream, Eggshell Black, Gilt Lustre, Pastel Blue or Pastel Rose, or in the new colours: Cherry Red, Willow Green, Dove Grey or Citron Yellow . . . all at the same price.

Supplied with heavy pressed glass diffusing-plate, shock-proof porcelain Lamp holder and three yards of flexible cord.

Only a 15 watt lamp is necessary.

**MOST GOOD ELECTRICAL AND RADIO STORES CAN SUPPLY.**

*The* **R.E.A.L.**  
**Plinth Light**

Pat No. 659,876

Issued by Rowlands Electrical Accessories Ltd., R.E.A.L. Works, BIRMINGHAM 18.

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Figure 5.7: The R.E.A.L. Plinth Light, *Ideal Home*, November 1956

The previous chapter has already shown how items of furniture such as television chairs and tables were instrumental in the domestication of television in as much as they helped to facilitate a flexible television living space. As with lighting, these items of furniture were also a key component of achieving the comfortable television lifestyle. Examples in magazines were given for how to achieve comfortable viewing with the right table and chair combinations. Chairs were presented as a means to comfortable viewing and ease of access to comfort foods. An article on television furniture entitled ‘your side of TV’ from *Ideal Home* in 1961, which we already encountered in the previous chapter, stated ‘viewing comfort is as important as the picture’ (see Figure 5.8).<sup>52</sup> A variety of chairs are pictured, including a divan with fold out table arms, chairs with flaps to support the feet alongside pouffes and footstools, to ensure maximum relaxation while viewing. One company, Atcraft Ltd, released special television chairs for children for ‘T.V. comfort.’ The advertisement explains that ‘parents everywhere are interested in making viewing times as comfortable as possible for their children.’<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Anon, “The Two Sides of TV,” 66.

<sup>53</sup> “For T.V. Comfort,” Atcraft, advertisement, *Good Housekeeping* (October 1956), 250.



Figure 5.8: “Your side of TV”: television chairs, *Ideal Home*, November 1961

Often the material culture around television was designed to facilitate eating while viewing. For example, in 1954 in *Ideal Home*, there was an illustration of how ‘three to four people can watch the television screen in great comfort’ with a long settee and a low set table, which ‘provides for coffee, sandwiches, drinks and ashtrays within reach of everybody.’<sup>54</sup> Access to provisions such as food and drink while viewing was one aspect of comfortable viewing, both that it could be comfortably reached for, but also that the food itself provided comfort. A supplement on TV suppers from *Woman and Home* in 1962 explained how to eat and view at the same time, using appropriate furniture and accessories:

<sup>54</sup> Anon, “With a view to television,” 55.

For supper with the show, the lights must be low but bright enough for eating. A coffee table by your chair makes the best serving base, with a candle-heater for hot food – or use lidded casseroles. Each member of the family can have a small rimmed tray on his or her knees, with a cushion underneath for rock steadiness. Hand round man-sized paper tissues or napkins, use polythene picnic plates for quietness, and bring out all your salt and pepper shakers to save passing from one to another during the programme.<sup>55</sup>

A number of objects are mentioned here as necessary for eating and viewing simultaneously, building a picture of the material culture developing around the television, in which everything from lighting to type of plate could play a role.

Much of this depended on purchasing the requisite commodities, which was expressed in advertisements for them. Advertisements for food products showed a convivial, comfortable atmosphere around viewing and eating. An advert for Sunpat salted nuts from *Good Housekeeping* in 1953 depicts two couples sitting watching television, each with a nut in their hands (see Figure 5.9).<sup>56</sup> The atmosphere is relaxed and the woman has a large smile on her face as she reaches into the bowl of nuts. As with the TV furniture, the snacks are easy to access on a low table. A home craft special from *Ideal Home* in 1961 demonstrated to readers how to build their own TV tea trolley, which made it ‘possible to arrange both to view and to eat in more comfort’<sup>57</sup> Ready-made TV trolleys could also be purchased, such as the Woodmet TV trolley, which was advertised in *Good Housekeeping* in 1956 (see Figure 5.10).<sup>58</sup> It is not remarkable that a woman is assembling the trolley in the image; we shall see in the following

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<sup>55</sup> Anon, “TV suppers,” supplement, *Woman and Home* (November 1962), 4.

<sup>56</sup> “Anytime is munchtime,” Sunpat, advertisement, *Good Housekeeping* (December 1953), 124.

<sup>57</sup> Anon, “TV tea trolley,” *Ideal Home* (March 1961), 114.

<sup>58</sup> “The stowaway trolley,” Woodmet Ware, advertisement, *Good Housekeeping* (February 1956), 23.

section how women were frequently presented as the facilitators of the comfortable television lifestyle.

The desire for comfort while viewing, therefore, depended upon purchasing products that were designed to enrich the experience of watching television. Advertisers, designers and manufacturers all contributed to a commodified version of the television lifestyle by making the connection between viewing comfort and the purchase of specific commodities. Interestingly, as a by-product of this, a unique material culture emerged around the television, in the form of objects and furnishings designed to enhance television viewing.

anytime is Munchtime...

Tempting, irresistible

**Sun-Pat**

The World's Finest  
**SALTED NUTS**

... flavour sealed in Air-tight Tins

124 H. S. WHITESIDE & COMPANY LIMITED, LONDON, S.E. 5

Figure 5.9: Sunpat advertisement, *Good Housekeeping*, December 1953

**LOOK!**

**10 SECONDS**

**THE STOWAWAY TROLLEY**

Handsome full-sized trolley which folds, leaving two Woodmet trays for use independently. Colourdysed Aluminium guarantees lifelong good looks. Its fully automatic, extra large wheels ensure easy running. Available with trays of various colours and patterns, rust proof, stain proof, untarnishable. Height 25", length 27", width 16". Fully guaranteed. £11.6.7d. inc. tax.

**INSIST ON**

**Woodmet WARE**

**T.V. TROLLEY**

For easy entertaining round the T.V. set. Lap high; designed to give an uninterrupted view of the screen; convenient, removable top tray. Height 20", length 25", width 15". Fully Guaranteed. £10.2.1d. inc. tax.

*The original Colourdysed Aluminium Trays and Trolleys. Colour Brochure sent on request to Woodmet Ltd., Dukinfield, Cheshire.*

Figure 5.10: Woodmet ware advertisement, *Good Housekeeping*, February 1956

## SELLING THE TELEVISION LIFESTYLE

The television lifestyle, which was born out of a desire for comfortable, healthy television viewing, became a symbol in advertisements in the 1950s and 60s, and was used to sell a particular vision of the comfortable, modern home. The television lifestyle was commodified; advertisers saw its potential as a means to sell products before the medium itself could show advertisements. In many cases, these advertisements made the connection between the provision of utilities, namely gas and electricity, and the enjoyment of leisure in the form of television viewing. Across lifestyle magazines, imagery associated with heating and lighting

often meshed with the image of the television and this was particularly apparent in advertisements for products that provided warmth and cosiness in the home.

An advert for the General Electric Company, from an edition of *Homes and Gardens* in 1953, framed the relationship between technology, television and domestic leisure (see Figure 5.11). The advert is situated in the domestic environment, depicting a man and woman sitting together in armchairs drinking claret while watching television. A generator is shown above the television set, effectively powering the leisure of the couple, represented in the television set and the light, which shines over the man's head not the woman's. Graeme Gooday's work on the spread of electricity in the home has shown that women in the late twentieth century resisted electric lighting because they worried its glare might show up their appearance unfavourably or create an unattractive ambience compared to gas light. The fact that in this advertisement the man is lit, and the woman is not, appears to resonate with the gendered way in which electric light was first domesticated.<sup>59</sup> More than this, it visually connects the male figure to the generator, as the light shade merges with the image of it above. The man is more actively connected to the outside world, represented through the generator, while the woman is seen to passively enjoy the fruits of its power in the form of television viewing. We shall see in the following section that woman's relationship to the television lifestyle was specifically based on her role as provider of leisure and comfort. In the advertisement, the television lifestyle of the couple is presented as sophisticated by the claret they are drinking and the historical television programme they are viewing, while the man's suit suggests that television viewing was still a reasonably formal activity. Yet comfort is also suggested by the rich red colour of the advert, the large armchairs, the man's cigarette and the low-level lighting, all of which give an impression of cosy interiority, which contrasts greatly with the industrial might of the generator powering it. The text draws attention to this juxtaposition:

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<sup>59</sup> Gooday, *Domesticating Electricity*, 153-196.

Electric power – to light your leisure and to warm your ease, to cook, to clean, to preserve, to bring you music and the moving pageant of the world [...]

Electric power – to run railways and light cities, to equip airports and turn the wheels of industry [...]

Electric power – to carry Britain’s reputation to the world’s end and keep our country prosperous in the new Elizabethan age.<sup>60</sup>

In a grandiose way, it connected the lighting of leisure in the home with the grander narrative of national progress: the same power running industry was powering the television, lyrically described as the ‘moving pageant of the world.’ In this way, television viewing is presented as progressive and modern, and the home that is plugged into the power of electricity was thus a modern and progressive one, which will share, it suggests, in the prosperity of ‘the new Elizabethan age’ (the advert is from the year of the Coronation).

The choice of the television set, rather than another electrical device such as a refrigerator, shows how critical television’s double articulation into the home was; television brought the outside world into the home providing leisure, and electricity facilitated this, and both together connected the home into modernity. The advert is suggestive of Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘mobile privatisation,’ highlighting that television can facilitate a connection, from within the privacy of the home, with the outside world.<sup>61</sup> The advert is a clear example of the ways in which the image of the television lifestyle fused, at a very early stage in television’s growth, with the concepts of technology, power and leisure in their capacity as the purveyors of

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<sup>60</sup> “The theme is power,” General Electric Company, advertisement, *Homes and Gardens* (June 1953), n.p.

<sup>61</sup> Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003 [1974]).

modernity. Notably, this framing takes place through the lens of consumer culture, as the main purpose of the advertisement was to promote the consumption of electricity. Given that the advertisement is from before 1955, this suggests that television became entrenched in consumer culture even during the monopoly of publicly-funded broadcasting.

*... the theme is power*

Electric power—to light your leisure and to warm your ease, to cook, to clean, to preserve, to bring you music and the moving pageant of the world. Power—with economy and efficiency—in a hundred products of G.E.C.

Electric power—to run railways and light cities, to equip airports and turn the wheels of industry. Power from vast capital plant made by G.E.C.

Electric power—to carry Britain's reputation to the world's end and keep our country prosperous in the new Elizabethan age.

**THE GENERAL ELECTRIC CO. LTD.**

**G.E.C.**

**One of Great Britain's great companies**

Figure 5.11: General Electric Company advertisement, *Homes and Gardens*, June 1953

Television sets featured in a range of different advertisements for domestic products. Given the debate surrounding television and the fireplace, it is perhaps surprising that television featured in advertisements for various types of fireplaces. Indeed, as the traditional fireplace was overtaken by newer devices, providers of heaters were keen to use the television lifestyle to influence consumers to consider how they heat their homes. The common depiction is of a roaring fire (or electric fire) with a television set, normally off, to the side. The advertisements bear slogans that confirm that the fireplace is the focal point of the room, the ideological centre, but the presence of TV implies there is room for both to coexist. An advert for Claygate English Fireplaces from 1953 reads ‘lulled to a deep contentment, you drowse and dream in the friendly warmth that blazes from the Old English Fireplace.’<sup>62</sup> The television’s presence in this advert, suggests that the fire could enhance the experience of watching by providing this background warmth and contentment. In this way, the fireplace is an accessory for television viewing; it provides an atmosphere and the ‘mystical importance,’ that Chapman highlighted,<sup>63</sup> was capitalised upon in these adverts and transformed into a commodified feature.

An advert for gas from 1960 in *Woman and Home* promoted a more modern way of heating the home, encouraging consumers to upgrade their heating system, rather than cling on to the open fire (see Figure 5.12). The advert, in the form of a cartoon, shows a woman standing beside her husband, shivering next to a roaring fireplace and television. It reads ‘she was ashamed of her cold-hearted home’ and the woman is depicted saying ‘I don’t know what Kay and Bill will think – this place is like a ‘fridge! Can’t we do better than that fire? – it’s hopeless.’<sup>64</sup> While she might have the modern accoutrements associated with a modern home, represented by the television set, she is afraid that her friends will judge her for having a cold

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<sup>62</sup> “Old English Fireplaces,” Claygate, advertisement, *Ideal Home* (January 1953), n.p.

<sup>63</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>64</sup> “She was ashamed of her cold-hearted home,” Gas, advertisement, *Woman and Home* (January 1960), 50.

home, for which, the advert suggests, there is reason to be ashamed. Furthermore, the home is described as cold-hearted, extending the association with feeling to the home itself. The traditional image of the roaring fire in the hearth, so often associated with a warm-hearted home, is here depicted as ineffective as the woman shivers next to it. Both the feelings of shame and coldness are experienced by the figure of the wife; the provision of warmth and cosiness in the home is presented as a female concern. The husband and wife visit the gas showroom where they purchase a gas heater, which is installed in place of the roaring fire. In the final cartoon, the friends are in the living room, with Kay remarking 'Joan darling what a cosy room this is – it's a pleasure to come into!' reasserting that it is the woman's responsibility to ensure that the home is comfortable. This advert realigned the cosy home with modern forms of heating powered by gas and relegated the traditional fire to obsolescence, thus creating a paradigm whereby those who could not afford gas heating had a home that felt shameful and was out of date. Considering that gas had been nationalised for over a decade by this time, it is noteworthy that the gas service felt the need to promote itself using these methods. The early relationship between technology, comfort and health, born out of the social ideals about gas and electricity from the early twentieth century, was eventually overtaken by a conception of the comfortable home as contingent upon consumption practices, which were indicative of social status.

**She was ashamed of her cold-hearted home!**

I don't know what Kay and Bill will think - this place is like the inside of a 'fridge! Can't we do better than that fire? - it's hopeless.

Fair enough. I'll see what I can do.

**AT THE GAS SHOWROOMS**

... About these new gas fires: I've one at the office and it's O.K. But can I heat my lounge with one?

Here's just the thing, Madam,—this gas convector radiant fire is specially designed to circulate warmth all round the room...

... It draws in cold air at the base, then heats it and circulates it as convector heat. You've ample direct heat, too, from these radiants.

And it's cheap to run—no dirt, no labour. Another good point—it ventilates while it heats the room!...

... you choose the heat you want with this selector—full on to start, then change down to half-on for constant comfort.

'Good! When can we have it? The sooner the better: the least we can do is to give our friends a warm welcome!

Joan darling what a cosy room this is - it's a pleasure to come into!

You're sure of a warm welcome from Mr. Therm!

You want healthy all-round-the-room comfort ...

**only GAS can give it!**

See the new gas fires at your Gas Showrooms

Approved by the Gas Council

Figure 5.12: Gas advertisement, *Woman and Home*, January 1960

The television set, as a visual motif, was used by advertisers as a means of selling a variety of products that were designed to bring warmth and cosiness into the home. A 1955 advert for British Carpets says that ‘for everyone – everywhere – carpets make a home’ and that ‘carpets spread their warmth and comfort.’<sup>65</sup> The advert depicts a television set next to a fireplace with a couple seated on the carpet (see Figure 5.13). The television is not on, but the trio of the carpet, fireplace and television are used as a visual assemblage to represent the comfort of being ‘at home.’ A similar image was used for an advert for Barry carpets from *Homes and Gardens* in 1963.<sup>66</sup> Again, a couple are seated in front of a television set, which is switched off, a tea tray rests on the floor, while the couple read a magazine. The atmosphere presented is of comfortable relaxation. There are very few objects present in the advert, only the television, a chair, the tea tray and magazine, indicating its importance as a visual symbol in advertising language.

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<sup>65</sup> “Buy a British Carpet,” British Carpets, advertisement, *Good Housekeeping* (March 1955), 218.

<sup>66</sup> “Courtaulds plus Barry = quality and colour,” Courtaulds and Barry, advertisement, *Homes and Gardens* (March 1963), 192.

**FOR EVERYONE - EVERYWHERE - CARPETS MAKE A HOME**

**Throughout Roy Rich and Brenda Bruce's London flat, carpets spread their warmth and comfort**

In their flat, high above the Bloomsbury rooftops, film producer Roy Rich and his wife Brenda Bruce — famous star of stage and screen — spend a quiet evening pasting up their press-cutting book. Well chosen all-wool carpets spread a cosy atmosphere of warmth and comfort throughout the flat. The grey two-tone on which Brenda is sitting is just one of the hundreds of new designs that your retailer can show you now. When making your choice, look for the label of The Federation of British Carpet Manufacturers — then you know you are making a good investment and getting the best value for your money.

**FREE** 20-page colour-illustrated booklet "How to Choose and Care for Carpets" packed with useful information and advice. Send a postcard today with your name and address to: The Federation of British Carpet Manufacturers, 10, Abchurch Lane, London, E.C. 4.

Buy a  
**BRITISH**  
**CARPET**  
that carries  
this label →

Figure 5.13: Carpet advertisement, *Good Housekeeping*, March 1955

Advertisements also played on a cosy, family orientated environment to promote their products. In an advert for Ruflette curtain tape from 1955 the television set is watched by a father and his two children, with thick curtains drawn behind the set. The father smokes a pipe and the children watch the set engrossed, the light from the set reflecting on their faces. The text reads 'when it's television time and the family's snuggled down for the evening, home will

be cheerier, warmer with special winter curtains.’<sup>67</sup> In a different twist on the immersive, cosy environment created around television viewing, an advert for Chubb locks from 1951, suggests that this atmosphere can be dangerous, as burglars can sneak in while the family is together and distracted.<sup>68</sup> Again it depicts a father smoking a pipe watching television with his two children. The TV screen emits sound and light making the atmosphere almost oppressive. It reads:

He knows you have a television set because he’s seen the give away aerial. So while you sit watching and listening, it’s a simple job for a burglar to pick your front door and get inside without you hearing a thing.<sup>69</sup>

The same kind of image which the *Ruflette* advert employs is transformed into something threatening: when your senses are dulled by television, because it is both visual and auditory, you become less aware of your surroundings. The purchase of these locks, however, mean you can focus fully on the television viewing experience. Thus, advertisers were using the television viewing experience in a variety of ways and engaging with the sensory dimension of television in often quite surprising ways.

The presence of television across these various advertisements illustrate the ways in which television became a potent visual motif in advertising language, before it was possible to advertise on television itself. In the constructed version of an ideal home, the image of the television set denoted domestic leisure and relaxation, so was used to promote products that could enhance relaxation in the home, by making it more comfortable. As we have seen in the previous section, comfortable television viewing practices formed the basis for a television

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<sup>67</sup> “Give your home winter curtains,” *Ruflette*, advertisement, *Ideal Home* (October 1955), 2.

<sup>68</sup> “Enter a burglar!,” Chubb, advertisement, *Homes and Gardens* (February 1951), 107.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

lifestyle, which, as this section has demonstrated, quickly became dependent on specific consumption behaviours. The purchase of a variety of television accessories, as well as products that provided comfort, like fireplaces and carpets, all helped to create the comfortable television lifestyle. At the same time, the motif of the television lifestyle was used as a means to sell these products. Through the consumption of these products, and by creating an ideal television lifestyle, consumers were offered a means to distinguish their homes, making it look and feel good.

### WOMEN'S LABOUR AND THE TELEVISION LIFESTYLE

So far, this chapter has demonstrated that a television lifestyle emerged, centred on the notion of comfort and reliant on the provision of utilities such as gas and electricity. Comfortable television viewing was born out of ideas about healthy, clean homes, but was quickly capitalised upon by manufacturers and advertisers. The comfortable television lifestyle was soon commodified and was constructed in magazines and advertisements as dependent upon the consumption of commodities, including utilities such as gas and electricity, and the products powered by them. Viewing comfort, in this new formulation, revolved around relaxation, pleasure and a sense of ease. This equation of comfort was not experienced equally by members of the household, however. The other vital element of the comfortable television lifestyle, which has already begun to emerge, is that it depended on the labour of women. Women were positioned as instrumental in the provision of the television lifestyle, in their role as consumers and providers in the home. This was part of a wider imagining of the ideal home in post-war Britain, in which women, in their role as housewives, were positioned as idealised figures. Women were viewed as consumers, playing a vital role in the burgeoning consumer culture of the 1950s.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See Penny Sparke, *As Long as its Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (Nova Scotia: NSCAD publishing, 2010 [1995]); Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, *Home* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

We have already seen how women's role as labourer within the home complicated their relationship with leisure, especially as the home came to be increasingly leisure-focused (see previous chapter). For this reason, television was initially viewed by some women as a threat to their domestic lives.<sup>71</sup> The flexible model for the TV living space, which was explored in the previous chapter, did make allowances for this and aimed to allow women to labour as they viewed, or at least to work as others viewed. However, the construction of the ideal, comfortable television lifestyle created new expectations for women's labour in the home. Achieving comfort while viewing was reliant on women facilitating it through her consumption decisions and her role as provider and hostess. Penny Sparke re-evaluates the role that women play as consumers in the home, highlighting the complexities involved in the continuous decisions that must be made in order to decorate and maintain a home.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, domestic magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* acted as a mediating force to educate and reassure women in their role as wives, mothers and consumers, taking seriously women's role as homemaker.<sup>73</sup> We shall see that it is in the advertisements, not the magazines, where the narrowest mould of women's role as homemaker is set in relation to the television consumption environment. Within this, some products aimed to alleviate women's labour time in the home and provide her with more time to enjoy the television lifestyle, however, women's leisure time was always framed as contingent upon the completion of her housework.

#### WOMEN AS PROVIDERS OF COMFORT

The material culture that was established around television viewing – in the form of comfortable chairs, easy to access tables, TV trolleys, and heating devices – was also designed to facilitate a culture of sociability around television. Magazine articles and advertisements

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<sup>71</sup> Helen Wood, "Television – the Housewife's Choice? The 1949 Mass Observation Television Directive, Reluctance and Revision," *Media History* 21, no. 3 (March 2015), 342-359.

<sup>72</sup> Penny Sparke, *As Long as its Pink*.

<sup>73</sup> Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* (New York: Pandora Press, 1987), 43.

frequently presented an image of television being enjoyed in groups of family and friends. Food was often instrumental in this sociable atmosphere around television viewing and was a key component of the idealised television lifestyle. In many cases, it was the figure of the housewife who was implicated as the consumer and provider of food to her family or her guests, while they view television. For example, *Woman and Home* in 1962 provided a whole supplement on TV suppers, in association with Heinz.<sup>74</sup> The guide provided different meals for different TV viewing settings, including a meal for two, a larger meal for eight and a trolley for up to fourteen teenagers. This suggests that even in 1962, when television was far more common in households across Britain, it was still situated as a social activity that brought people, of all ages, together.

Guidance for women on how to provide for TV ‘parties’ began in the early 1950s; the connection between consuming food and television formed early on in television’s domestication. In 1953, *Woman* had features in January and October on recipes for these social occasions. The article from January entitled ‘come in for the evening’ showed a hostess how to welcome their guests: ‘when friends, be they young or old, are invited for an evening [...] to watch television [...] the hostess likes to offer refreshments.’<sup>75</sup> The article laid out recipe ideas for easy to prepare sandwiches and snacks to accompany coffee, making intrinsic the connection between social television viewing and the consumption of refreshments. The notion of expediency for TV dinners and snacks was frequently espoused. The 1962 *Woman and Home* TV supper guide told its readers:

When a favourite evening television programme comes round, the clever cook doesn’t spend much time in the kitchen. She looks for food that is easy to prepare

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<sup>74</sup> Anon, “TV Suppers,” 1.

<sup>75</sup> Anon, “Come in for the evening,” *Woman* (31 January 1953), 18.

and simple to serve, it may be early, late, or interval eating – a sandwich snack or main meal – for two or a large family get together. All good fireside food spares the home cook, and our television suppers are very good.<sup>76</sup>

The savvy hostess, therefore, was able to construct a meal with minimal fuss, whatever time of the day it was; if a woman was efficient then she was able to reduce her own labour time, minimising effort but maximising impact. Women's labour and time was an essential ingredient in the TV dinner. In *Woman* in October 1953, a selection of Gracie Alperovici's recipes were printed for when there are friends for supper or to watch TV. The article highlights that the hosts are husband and wife, but that Gracie does all the cooking, which is used as the main way to welcome their guests:

When Gracie and Boris are in this country they like nothing better than a cosy get-together round the fireside with a few friends. And when they entertain it's home cooking they prefer to give their guests.<sup>77</sup>

The cosy setting by the fire and the home-cooking are indicators of 'homeliness,' which was facilitated by Gracie's work in the kitchen; female labour was necessary to facilitate the comfort. Gracie was the one composing and cooking the recipes, which might warrant the description of 'chef,' but the article firmly positioned her as a housewife, who provided food in her role as wife and hostess.

Indeed, the provision of comfort through labour was often constructed as a source of pride for the hostess. A *Good Housekeeping* special on fireside entertaining from 1956 featured

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<sup>76</sup> Anon, "TV suppers," 2.

<sup>77</sup> Gracie Alperovici, "Special tea party? Friends to supper or to watch TV? Here's a host of good things to meet the occasion," *Woman* (31 October 1953), 3.

instructions on how to be the perfect ‘television hostess’ (see Figure 5.14).<sup>78</sup> Again, though the advice is for a television evening, it is still conceived as a ‘fireside’ activity, which connotes comfort, cosiness and homeliness. Her success as a television hostess is presented as dependent upon having bought the right things. This includes how she herself is dressed; the caption to the image reads ‘a quiet evening “looking in” – smart girls dress right for the party.’ The use of ‘girls’ suggests that this article was aimed at a younger hostess, which is how she is referred to later on. The accompanying image depicts a living area with a man sat on a settee holding a tray with coffee and biscuits on it, while the young woman perches her leg on the edge of the settee, gesturing towards a coffee table with more refreshments on it. The television set is in the background next to a magazine rack; while this is an article about being a television hostess, the receiver itself is peripheral to the action, highlighting the importance of the furniture and the refreshments in ensuring television viewing is comfortable and enjoyable. The man is sat down, enjoying the spread that the woman has laid on, and her position on the edge of the sofa implies that she is there to provide for him. He is settled in his seat, but she is only temporarily in situ, waiting to facilitate his leisure. The text explains that she has television seating, a table for the coffee, television crockery, and the fashionable Pye television receiver designed by Robin Day.<sup>79</sup> The earlier sections of the chapter have shown that these kinds of items were frequently connected to comfortable television viewing. The article posits the question, ‘what more could a television hostess ask?’ indicating that she has successfully created the ideal television viewing environment for her guests. The article confirms this, writing ‘we’re sure the programme was good – but the young hostess [...] has the scene set for a successful evening anyway.’ Through hosting a television evening, a hostess, or housewife, could present her hosting skills and the right consumption choices were a key factor in presenting well. As already highlighted, magazines like *Good Housekeeping* took seriously these kinds of

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<sup>78</sup> Anon, “Fireside Festival,” *Good Housekeeping* (October 1956), 85.

<sup>79</sup> See Chapter 3.

consumption decisions and the role played by women as homemakers, thus is it important to resist seeing the role of the 'television hostess' as entirely trivial. Nonetheless, this construction of the 'feminine' helped to define gender power relations around the enjoyment of television.

As Janet Thumim contends:

In the case of the feminine it is the maintenance of social order in which women can be depended on to perform certain designated tasks of which men may enjoy the benefits while retaining over all social control, hence power.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Janet Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture: Men, Women and the Box* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 32.



Figure 5.14: “Fireside Festival,” *Good Housekeeping*, October 1956

We see a further example of how to be a ‘television hostess’ in the aforementioned TV supper guide from *Woman and Home* from 1961, which promised to provide menus and meals which will ‘bring you compliments from the family.’<sup>81</sup> The cover of the supplement depicts a couple sitting in front of a television set, with the man seated on a chair, with the woman beneath him at his feet, with a tray of food on a table in the foreground (see Figure 5.15). The man’s position

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<sup>81</sup> “TV suppers,” 1.

in the chair suggests that he is settled in a fixed spot from which he can watch the television, while the woman's place on the floor is more temporary, implying that she will not be partaking in the television viewing and eating for long, bearing resemblance to the set up in the previous example. The man rests his hand reassuringly on her shoulder, with her looking back at him, comforted by his implicit approval. In the background, the warm glow of the fire is evocative of the cosy environment, creating a visual association between television, the food on the tray and the fireplace, arguably the three tenets of the cosy television lifestyle. The woman, despite being sat on the floor, beneath the man, is positioned at the centre of the image; she is the core of the comfortable home. As with the previous example, this indicates that the manner in which a woman provided for her family and her guests is reflected back on her. She could prove her acumen as housewife through the way in which she provided a comfortable television viewing environment.

In this and the previous example, male viewing pleasure is presented as central to these depictions of the television lifestyle. Other studies of television's domestication have explored narratives of television as a 'feminised' domestic product, with programming and scheduling designed around the typical daily life of women.<sup>82</sup> These examples suggest that television viewing was positioned as a male pursuit, which women enabled through providing comfort while men viewed. This version of domestication does not necessarily align with the idea that television's domestication affiliated it with female leisure time in the home, rather it suggests that women helped to domesticate television for the purposes of providing a male viewing environment.

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<sup>82</sup> Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture*.



Figure 5.15: TV Supper supplement, *Woman and Home*, November 1962

It is noteworthy that the supplement was sponsored by Heinz; the consumption of food while television viewing was increasingly interwoven with consumer culture. Advertisements for food were quick to capitalise on the link between food and television consumption. For example, a Guinness advert from 1955 shows a couple watching television with both man and woman with a glass of Guinness and eating their dinners while viewing. The advert gives advice on how ‘to enjoy your T.V. more’:

1. When there is something special to watch, and people are coming home late, get a simple spread ready to eat round your set.
2. To make you simple spread simply delightful get in a few bottles of Guinness; it is always enjoyed a lot.<sup>83</sup>

The enjoyment of TV, it suggests, would be enhanced by eating a simple spread and drinking a Guinness, making a clear link between television viewing and consuming food and drink. Although not made explicit, these tips were most likely aimed at the woman of the couple, given that the advert appeared in *Woman and Home*, a magazine aimed at a female readership. Indeed, these advertisements for food products often cast the role of housewife as the providing figure; there are several adverts that depict the mother figure as the supplier of food and drink, while the family or guests view television.

Many of these adverts emphasise that the food product is easy to prepare, meaning that the woman can assemble it at a moment’s notice if her family are hungry or guests come to view. An advert for Stork margarine from 1956 showed a variety of baked goods that could be served to guests and family, with small cartoons showing the woman bringing these snacks to the

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<sup>83</sup> “It’s the appetizing taste of Guinness that goes so well with food,” Guinness, advertisement, *Woman and Home* (March 1955), 88.

viewers.<sup>84</sup> Included in this was ‘on the spot T.V.’ savouries’ which are ‘so quick to prepare – so satisfying.’ A similar theme was used in a Primula cheese spread advert from 1958 asked ‘is this your life?’ and showed a series of images of times when family, friends or workmen might need food.<sup>85</sup> One image shows a man and two children in front of a TV set looking away from the set towards the viewer, with the caption ‘poor dears – watching TV is hungry work!’, implying that this is what the woman said out loud, and in parenthesis ‘I’d like to meet the man who invented TV snacks!’, showing her inner thoughts. The advert, therefore, is playing with the idea that TV snacks have added a new demand on women’s time as yet another meal that she must provide. Primula cheese spread was offered as the solution to this problem: ‘feeding a hungry family [...] then always keep a few packs of Primula.’ An advert for Kellogg’s from 1954 depicted similar demands on the woman to feed her family ‘round the clock,’ for which Kellogg’s products can help.<sup>86</sup> In the final image, the family are shown watching television and the caption reads ‘ever tried Corn Flakes and cold rice pudding with added condensed milk? It’s a wonderful cold sweet for the TV interval, guaranteed not to upset delicate tummies.’ While the woman is pictured viewing with her family, we know that she has had to prepare this snack in the interval, thus television viewing is fused with labour. We know that the woman is expected to prepare the Kellogg’s snacks because she is addressed directly: ‘clever housewives can concoct lots more variations on this single, delicious theme.’ This reference to the ‘clever’ housewife, which we saw earlier, once again creates a hierarchy among housewives, whereby those that are proficient use the products on offer to ensure that their family and guests are always fed, with minimal fuss. By this logic, if a housewife struggles to ensure this, then she is merely a less competent housewife, shifting the blame back on to women, rather than an unrealistic expectation on women to constantly provide.

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<sup>84</sup> “On the spot TV favourites,” Stork, advertisement, *Woman and Home* (February 1956), n.p.

<sup>85</sup> “Is this your life?,” Primula Cheese, advertisement, *Woman and Home* (June 1958), 77.

<sup>86</sup> “Round the clock with Kellogg’s,” Kellogg’s, advertisement, *Woman’s Own* (18 February 1954), 11.

One advertisement for Cadbury's drinking chocolate from 1954 subverted the theme of the woman providing comfort to her guests. The image still depicts a woman serving cups to her guests, who are sat around a television set, but the text reveals a twist. The caption poses the question 'are men more intelligent?' which is then discussed in the text:

After we'd finished looking-in on the discussion the argument *really* started. Gerald said men were obviously superior. They could tackle anything – *even cooking*. Julia looked wicked and remarked that as a cook Gerald made a very good golfer! Then, just as I was saying that Nigel didn't even know what a kitchen looked like, in the dear marches. Complete with hot cups of chocolate for all. Delicious! Had to admit men were *rather* clever.<sup>87</sup>

'Looking-in' is shown to be the catalyst for the conversation, presenting television as an addition to the party rather than a stultifying force. The hot chocolate becomes the final comforting addition to this sociable evening, but in this equation, the man is the one who has provided it, earning the moniker of 'clever,' which was normally attributed to housewives. The advert playfully engages with the divisions between genders, with the men encroaching on the traditionally female domain by suggesting they can cook too. The female narrator is endowed with a knowing tone, as her and the other female figure are able to pick apart the boasts of the men, implying that the question of whether men were more intelligent was still open to debate. By picking up on these themes around who provides food, the advertisement exposes how prevalent the gender norms around television viewing and food provision were in the 1950s, but also that they did not always pass under the radar undetected.

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<sup>87</sup> "Are men more intelligent?," Cadbury's, advertisement, *Woman's Own* (4 February 1954), 8.

## SAVING WOMEN TIME TO WATCH TV

The need for a comfortable television viewing environment and the creation of the ‘TV snack,’ vital components of the ideal television lifestyle, served to create more work for women, as they were expected to facilitate this way of life. A range of products were advertised for their ability to *reduce* women’s labour time and ensure that she had more time to view with her family. However, these examples constructed women’s leisure time as contingent upon their labour.

Since the 1920s, electricity and gas were promoted, in adverts and pamphlets, for their labour-saving potential, which would free up more time for everyday leisure. The benefits of labour saving devices were usually aimed at women, who were the primary carers in the home.<sup>88</sup> Electricity, labour saving devices and the benefits of gas powered fires and hot water were sold as domestic servants that would free up women’s time for other pursuits. Once television arrived into the home, it was used as a symbol of the leisure that could be gained from investing in gas or electrical products. A promotional advert for the electric home from 1962 featured in *Ideal Home* magazine shows a woman lying on a sofa reading a magazine, with a television set behind her. The tag line reads ‘sit back and enjoy life – let electricity do the work.’<sup>89</sup> Though the television set is not actively doing anything in the image, its presence suggests the possibility of other leisure activities that the woman could now partake in now her labour time has been reduced. An advert from 1963, from *Ideal Home*, for gas takes a different tack, but still follows the formula that utilities gave women more time (see Figure 5.16). It is in the form of a cartoon strip and depicts a housewife exhausted by her washing up duties. Her husband sees this and goes to the gas showroom to buy her a water heater. A week later she is serving tea to her family who are all in front of the television set. Her husband says to her ‘...time off

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<sup>88</sup> Schwartz Cohen, *More Work for Mother*.

<sup>89</sup> “Plug into electric living,” Electricity, advertisement, *Ideal Home* (October 1962), 81.

for tea and T.V. – this is something like!’ to which she responds ‘Bert! Give me hot water by Gas anytime – it makes all the difference!.’<sup>90</sup> In this advert, gas is shown to provide the housewife with the chance to enjoy leisure pursuits with her family for the first time. While her chores could not be left to one side to do this, the efficiency of the gas water heater speeds up her labour freeing up her time for leisure, which is symbolised in the television set. The housewife is active in her role as the provider of comfort for her family in the form of cleaning and as the provision of the tea served alongside the TV viewing, but it is the man who goes to the gas showroom to purchase the means to lessen her load. His purchase of the water heater, and the water heater itself, are shown to provide the housewife with the opportunity to finally watch TV with her family; the new efficiency of her labour is a by-product of these factors, rather than something she herself has achieved, effectively rendering her a passive figure.

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<sup>90</sup> “She couldn’t stand it any longer,” Gas, advertisement, *Ideal Home* (May 1963), 144.

**She couldn't stand it any longer...**

... we have to get hot water the hard way!

**AT THE GAS SHOWROOMS**

'Bert, you really must do something about the hot water—I can't stand this any longer! ...

... it's really getting me down!  
'What d'you expect me to do? Work a miracle?'

'... No, but Old Man Therm can do it—me and the wife had the same hot water headache!'

'It's the gas water heater for any kitchen—warm or hot water instantly, and boiling in less than a minute! ...

**A WEEK LATER**

... turn it on, turn it off, for instant hot water. It's as simple as that!

'There we are—washed up, wiped up, and a clear sink! That's a change, isn't it? And now for ...

...time off for tea and T.V.—this is something like!

Bert! Give me hot water by Gas anytime—it makes all the difference!

**only GAS can do it**

You want instant, endless hot water at the turn of a tap—

144

Gas Council

Figure 5.16: Advertisement for Gas, *Ideal Home*, May 1963

Quick-to-assemble food stuffs were also advertised as a means for a woman to quickly complete her work and then, as a result, have time to view television. An advert for Nescafe from 1951 depicts a mother handing cups of coffee to her husband and two children, who are seated around the television console (see Figure 5.17).<sup>91</sup> The text reads ‘so quick to make – you don’t miss a thing,’ thus the instant nature of Nescafe is here a boon for women, because they can provide refreshments for their family, while also enjoying the entertainment of viewing. An advert for Sunblest bread from 1957 shows the mother bringing in a tray of tea and sandwiches to accompany the brand-new television set (see Figure 5.18). The text reads ““thank god I had time to make the sandwiches” Mum thought. “I wouldn’t have wanted to miss a minute of this”.”<sup>92</sup> Both these examples suggest that the care of the family is the priority and her viewing secondary. Despite the fact that these adverts both offer women a chance to view with their families, the images still show the father and children on one side of the frame, with the television set, and the woman on the other side, holding the refreshments that she has prepared and is now serving. Women’s leisure cannot take place at the expense of her work; therefore, she must consume easy-to-assemble food and drink products, like Nescafé, and only then enjoy the viewing environment created.

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<sup>91</sup> “There’s always time for a Nescafe,” Nescafe, advertisement, *Woman* (8 December 1951), 36.

<sup>92</sup> “The day the TV set arrived,” Sunblest, advertisement, *Woman* (19 January 1957), 7.

*There's always  
time for*

**NESCAFÉ**

So quick to make—you don't miss a thing. And what rich, fragrant coffee! Yes, for coffee you're proud to serve, rely on Nescafé; put a spoonful in the cup, add near-boiling water. As good as only Nestlé's know how to make it, Nescafé gives you coffee with roaster-fresh fragrance and flavour whenever you want it.



*Nescafé is a soluble coffee product composed of coffee solids, combined and powdered with dextrins, maltose and dextrose added to protect the flavour*

**ANOTHER OF NESTLÉ'S GOOD THINGS**

Figure 5.17: Advertisement for Nescafé, *Woman*, 8 December 1951



### THE DAY THE T.V. SET ARRIVED

**T**HERE never had been such excitement. Sue absolutely bounced with impatience—why must Daddy go on asking questions? If the man from the shop had to answer them all the set would *never* be installed. “Oh, I *wish* they’d stop talking,” Sue whispered to Larry. Larry, too excited to speak, nodded agreement.

And then all of a sudden it was done. The man had finished and the set was ready. “Call Mum, Larry,” Daddy said. Larry dashed to the door. “Mum!” he yelled. “Come quickly. It’s about to start!”

Almost at once Mum, her eyes bright with excitement, appeared with a tray of tea and sandwiches. “Quick, dear,” said Daddy. “We’re just going to switch it on.” They all gazed rapturously at the screen. “Thank goodness I had time to make sandwiches,” Mum thought. “I wouldn’t have wanted to miss a moment of this.”

When you’re buying white or brown bread, look for the Sunblest symbol—the sign of good bread. It’s your guarantee of a well baked, fresh and wholesome loaf. Only *good* bread baked by *good* bakers can carry the Sunblest symbol.

**Sunblest bread is good bread**

**fresh to the last slice**



ISSUED BY THE QUALITY BAKERS OF BRITAIN

Figure 5.18: Advertisement for Sunblest, *Woman*, 19 January 1957

Lynn Spigel has demonstrated how magazine articles and advertisements in the United States in the 1940s and 50s frequently depicted women's television viewing as dependent on chores being completed first. She highlights that 'representations of television continually address women as housewives and presented them with a notion of spectatorship that was inextricably intertwined with their useful labor at home'<sup>93</sup> As this section has shown, in Britain, the construction of women's relationship to television viewing was also deeply intertwined with their work within the home. The adverts discussed reveal the often-hidden dimension behind the idealised television lifestyle: that of woman's labour in the home and the fact that, for them, the boundaries between work and leisure were always blurred and necessarily contingent. For women, the relationship between leisure and technology was complex, as it was presented as providing relief from work, yet also conditional upon work. This a further example of the gendered ways in which magazines and advertisements constructed the comfort and leisure involved in the television lifestyle.

## CONCLUSION

During the process of television's domestication in the 1950s and 60s, television became intertwined with the concept of comfort in the ideal home. Television's arrival into the home coincided with rising standards of living, due to the better provision of electricity, gas and indoor plumbing. Across classes, comfortable home life became a reality, as did greater amounts of leisure time to spend at home. These conditions laid some of the foundations for television's success as a domestic medium, but the arrival of television also created a greater demand for comfort as television owners spent more hours of their evenings viewing. Advice was provided for television owners on how to view in a comfortable, healthy manner. This often revolved around ensuring that the room was well-lit, warm and that there was no potential for eye-strain. Comfortable television viewing, therefore, relied on the provision of other

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<sup>93</sup> Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 75.

utilities like gas and electricity, showing that television's domestication was relational to the other technologies shaping the home in the same period. From these comfortable viewing practices, a television lifestyle began to emerge, which was formed around a leisurely, comfortable version of domesticity. This television lifestyle was soon commodified, with manufacturers and advertisers seizing upon its potential to symbolise the modern, leisure-based, cosy home. Across a variety of articles and advertisements in lifestyle magazines, the television appeared in conjunction with commodities that could provide comfort in the home, from heating devices to food products. The television lifestyle was constructed as dependent upon the purchase of certain items, which were positioned as necessary to achieve ideal viewing conditions. This took the form of a unique material culture around television viewing in the form of objects like television trolleys, television lights, and television crockery. In this way, it is apparent that television, as a visual motif, became embedded in advertising practices, and therefore consumer culture, before it was possible to advertise on television itself. In the construction of the television lifestyle, it was women who were positioned as the main consumer of these products, as well as providing the comfort through their labour. Advertisements and magazine articles frequently addressed women in their capacity as housewives, showing them how to ensure that their guests and family were always provided for when they viewed television, from the environment they viewed within to the refreshments they were served. While some products, including labour saving devices powered by gas and electricity, were framed as a way for women to reduce their labour time and therefore enjoy viewing television with her family, women's leisure was still conditional on her labour being completed first. The television lifestyle, therefore, depended upon the (often invisible) labour of women. Thus, through examining the television lifestyle, it is possible to comprehend the varied ways in which the material form of television permeated domestic culture in the post-war period, becoming intrinsically connected to ideas about how the home should look, feel and function.

## CONCLUSION: TELEVISION IN ITS PLACE?

Scholars have highlighted that if we ignore the physicality of the television set, then we ignore its symbolic importance as a household object.<sup>94</sup> Just as we might frequently take our television sets for granted, academic scholarship has paid too little attention to this ubiquitous object-technology. This thesis aimed to redress this imbalance by providing a cultural history of how the television set was domesticated. It has laid emphasis on the physical form of the television set, considering it as a material object-technology that both streams information into the home and resides physically within it, borrowing from Roger Silverstone's idea of television's 'double articulation.'<sup>95</sup> The first part of the thesis examined how television developed from an invention in the interwar period into a commodity designed for the home, which happened through the design, manufacture and marketing of receivers. It showed that television's domestication was pre-figured in the process of television's commodification. The second part explored how television sets were ideally integrated into constructions of domesticity, through how television owners were advised to position their television sets within their homes and integrate it into their domestic lives.

I have examined the process of domestication in this thesis, and found that within this process, the television set became suffused with cultural meaning, as it became symbolic of, and instrumental in, the implementation of constructions of taste, class and gender. I have posited that this process need to be viewed within its historical context. In Britain, television entered into the home at a specific juncture, which has to be taken into account when considering how

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<sup>94</sup> See David Morley 'Television – not so much a Visual Medium, more a Visible Object,' in *Visual Culture*, ed. C. Jenks (Routledge: London, 1995), 170-189; Thomas Berker, Yves Punie and Maren Hartmann, *Domestication of Media and Technology*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005); Tim O'Sullivan, "Researching the Viewing Culture: Television and the Home 1946-60" in *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*, ed. Helen Wheatley (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

<sup>95</sup> Roger Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life* (London and New York: Routledge 1994).

television was domesticated. A central aim of this thesis was to build upon the theoretical scholarship around the consumption of media and apply it historically, by considering the other factors shaping the British home in the same time frame. This has allowed me to gain an understanding of television's influence on the construction of the modern British home, and vice versa.

Before television's appropriation into domesticity can be considered, this thesis has conjectured that it is first necessary to examine how television's domestication was pre-figured in the ways television was shaped into a consumer good, arguing that it was during this process that television was positioned as a domestic object-technology. The domestication process, therefore, was shaped by numerous factors, including manufacturers, marketing material, market conditions, and consumers, many of which have been overlooked in previous histories of early television. Yet manufacturers and marketing material played a key role in positioning television as a domestic object, which was fundamental to its mass take-up in the post-war period. How potential consumers were introduced to television from the interwar period onwards was vital to this process and, as chapter 2 has highlighted, it was in spaces like exhibitions, department stores and museums that the first mass encounters with television took place. Indeed, it is important to note, as Hartley and Wheatley have both done, that television began its life as a spectacle in the public sphere.<sup>96</sup> Beyond its spectacular beginnings, however, television's negotiation into a commodity destined for the home took place in these kinds of spaces. Alongside marketing material, like advertisements and brochures, from the mid-1930s, television was consciously positioned as a desirable consumer good. Chapter 3 has revealed how many of the tropes used to promote television in the interwar period persisted in the post-war period and in promotional material for colour television in the late 1960s and 70s,

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<sup>96</sup> See Helen Wheatley, *Spectacular Television: Exploring Televisual Pleasure* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris); John Hartley, *The Uses of Television* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

indicating that a blueprint for television's consumption was laid down in this formative period for television. This is why I have argued that we should see television's interwar development as more than a prologue to its post-war proliferation, rather this was the stage at which television's identity as a domestic object-technology was formed.

However, in asking how television was domesticated, the thesis discovered that television's development into a commodity destined for the home was not inevitable. In the interwar period, television was conceived in multiple ways, not only as a medium that would be received within the home. Chapter 2 demonstrated how television was simultaneously positioned as a technical marvel, public spectacle and domestic commodity at trade fairs, exhibitions and demonstrations. Television manufacturers (such as Baird Ltd), in particular, pushed television towards being a domestic medium, as they saw this as the best way to maximise potential profits from the technology. As a result of this, increasing pressure was put on the BBC by manufacturers to develop the television service, indicating the importance of television manufacturers to the early development of television. Furthermore, as chapter 3 contends, in order for television to become a successful domestic commodity, consumers had to find value in obtaining one and be able to imagine it as part of their homes.<sup>97</sup> This supports my assertion that it is necessary to consider how television's development into a consumer good, as this reveals the multiple forces that were instrumental in determining the route that early television ended up taking, beyond the broadcasting institutions, namely the BBC.

A central intervention of this thesis has been to establish that, by examining television's domestication, we can establish the multiple ways in which television was entwined with consumer culture from the interwar period onwards, when manufacturers began to position

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<sup>97</sup> It is important to note here that consumer choices were shaped, in part, by market realities; in the mid 1950s, rising affluence and the rise of rental options, as well as Hire Purchase as a means to purchase goods, all gave consumers a greater ability to be able to afford a set.

television receivers as domestic commodities. This challenges the conception that the introduction of commercial television in 1955 marked a fundamental rupture in the life of British television. Instead, the television set itself, fundamental to the act of viewing television, was *necessarily* embedded in consumer culture at a very early stage in television's progression. Moreover, this thesis has established that television's relationship to consumer culture is further revealed by examining television's integration into constructions of the home. In chapter 5, there are many examples of advertisements for commodities that featured television in them, from carpets and fireplaces to drinks and snacks. Several of these date from before 1955, indicating that, while it was not yet possible to advertise on the medium itself, television quickly became a potent symbol in consumer culture's visual lexicon. I have argued in this chapter that a television lifestyle, which began in the early 1950s, was built upon consumer practices, whereby achieving ideal viewing conditions depended upon the purchase of certain goods and services. Not only was the television set commodified, but also the whole viewing environment. Television's relationship to consumer culture, therefore, does not solely rest on the introduction of ITV, but was, in fact, much more multidimensional than has previously been allowed for.

Television's domestication was not inevitable or pre-determined. The second section of this thesis has examined how television was domesticated by exploring how it was ideally integrated into the home in the post-war period, as well as by finding evidence of the lived reality of owning a television. After all, television's domestication rested on its acceptance by householders, who made decisions about whether to take the new medium into their homes according to their own 'moral economies.'<sup>98</sup> Television owners were provided with various forms of advice on how to integrate television into their domestic lives, in lifestyle and design magazines, as well as at exhibitions and trade fairs. As Lynn Spigel has posited, this helped to

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<sup>98</sup> Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, "Information and Communication Technologies."

form the ‘horizons of expectations’ that consumers had about the place of television in their domestic lives, potentially influencing a household’s ‘moral economy.’<sup>99</sup>

Through an exploration of how television was domesticated, it has become apparent that television’s ideal integration into the home was historically contingent. This thesis has brought together scholarship from across design history, British history, sociology, and media studies, to situate television’s domestication in Britain within its context, moving beyond a theoretical paradigm.<sup>100</sup> Chapter 4 has determined that television entered into the home at a specific historical juncture, when a particular modernist design agenda figured how the home should ideally look and function. Chapter 5 has explored how a shifting emphasis on comfort and leisure in the home concurrently influenced how television was ideally domesticated, with television owners advised to make their viewing spaces as comfortable as possible. Both of these chapters have shown that historical changes in the home were key to how television was ideally integrated into domestic space and that television played a role in cementing many of the changes happening in the British home, especially the shift towards a more informal, adaptable, and comfortable way of living.

In-keeping with modern domestic ideals, television owners were advised to construct a flexible, functional living space, in which television would not become too dominant. This was dependent upon the existing material culture of the home, as lighting and furniture were all deployed as effective means to divide the living space into manageable sections. This approach to television’s domestication developed out of anxieties that television would dominate domestic life. From the early stages of its domestication, television was viewed by some as potentially threatening to domestic life and an object-technology that needed to be restrained.

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<sup>99</sup> Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and the Post-war Suburbs* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>100</sup> See Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, “Information and Communication Technologies.”

Unlike radio, which was a purely aural medium, television's visual nature created a new set of complications for its domestication. The construction of a flexible, adaptable living space, in which television can be turned on when needed but recede into the background when off, appears to have been created in response to these anxieties. Controlling television was not only achieved through turning the set on or off, and making choices about what to watch, but also through its material form.

While streamlined flexibility was favoured on the one hand, the importance of a comfortable, warm, well-lit home were also key tenets of the ideal modern home. A comfortable home was reliant upon other furniture, but also technologies, namely gas and electricity. These utilities were necessary to provide the heating and lighting that were presented as essential to achieving a comfortable environment for viewing television. The flexible approach to domesticating television was, to some degree, at odds with the comfortable model of domestication, with the former favouring a particular design aesthetic and the latter a focus on the 'feel' of the viewing space. Television's domestication played into various constructions of the modern home in the post-war period, which, interestingly, were able to exist simultaneously within the same publications and exhibitions. Modernity is increasingly seen in scholarship as meaning many different things, with no one fixed definition.<sup>101</sup> The evidence in this thesis suggests the same thing; that television's place in the home reflected multiple definitions of modern, which were expressed through design and technology.

Both models, however, were contingent upon the material culture of the home. By focusing on the material form of the television set, it has been possible to make connections between television and the home, which would not have been possible had I taken an institutional or

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<sup>101</sup> Martin Daunt and Bernhard Rieger, eds., *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late Victorian Era to World War Two* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

textual approach. Another central intervention of this thesis, therefore, has been to demonstrate that television's domestication was relational to, and dependent upon, the objects, furniture and technologies that were concurrently shaping the home. It is critical that television's domestic situation is not seen as absolute, or distinct, from the rest of the home, but instead engaged in a symbiotic relationship with it. Scholarship on television's relationship with the home has mostly focused on the socio-behavioural ways in which television has been managed in the home. This thesis adds to this debate by demonstrating that this also has a physical dimension to it, with television's place in the home managed through its material position in the home. In this way, television was 'put in its place' both figuratively and literally.

The 'putting in its place' of television was not, however, a neutral affair, with the television set meaning different things to different consumers. Through the exploration of the ideal domestication of television, a class dimension has emerged. In chapter 4, I have investigated how the modernist ethos quickly came to be primarily associated with middle class taste and lifestyles, which meant that the ideal domestication of television was inflected with specific notions of class and taste.<sup>102</sup> We can draw parallels with how television was commodified; chapter 3 showed how the consumption of the television set was similarly influenced by modernist ideals of design and taste. Consumers were advised, in design publications and lifestyle magazines, to purchase television sets that adhered to modernist principles, so that they could fit in with a tasteful, contemporary interior.

Crucially, consumer choices often defied the models laid out in the mediated material. As Attfield has argued, these micro choices made by consumers or householders were a key factor

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<sup>102</sup> Penny Sparke, *As Long as its Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (Nova Scotia: NSCAD publishing, 2010 [1995]).

in bringing modernity into the home.<sup>103</sup> Chapter 4 has shown how television owners created their own model of ‘flexible modernity’ around the television set, which still allowed for a sentimental approach to home design, retaining elements such as the fireplace, despite its obsolescence. The ideal model was too rigid in its approach to flexibility, as it did not allow for the fact that objects and furniture in the home have meanings that extend beyond the practical. Similarly, consumers put their own value upon television. Design publications and magazines advocated choosing a well-designed television to fit seamlessly into the home, but for some consumers, owning a television was a status symbol. As chapter 3 highlighted, for these television owners, television was pride of place in the home, symbolic of the hard work that had gone into purchasing one. Rather than television being a domineering force that had to be assimilated subtly into the home, television was an object that was actively put on display. Consumers of television, therefore, also played a key role in the domestication process, making their own value judgements about which television to buy and where to put it.

This thesis has demonstrated that the model for how television should be domesticated was deeply intertwined with post-war ideas about design and taste, which were centred on a modernist, streamlined aesthetic, embraced by the middle classes. The mediated version of how to consume and domesticate television reflected specifically middle class anxieties about television dominating the home and the advice on how to avoid this spoke to a particular taste matrix. While these kinds of connections – between class, taste and consumption – have been made in relation to other domestic objects and furnishings, in the work of Attfield, Sparke and Miller across design history and sociology, this thesis has made explicit how television’s object form became embedded in the same kinds of discourses.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Judy Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home: Writings on Popular Design and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

<sup>104</sup> See Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*; Sparke, *As Long as it’s Pink*, 1995; Daniel Miller, “Appropriating the State on the Council Estate,” *Man: New Series* 23, No.2 (June 1988), 353-372.

Finally, a unifying thread that reappears throughout the thesis is the role assigned to women in the domestication of television. In their constructed position as consumers and domestic guardians, women were viewed as instrumental to the acceptance of television in the home.<sup>105</sup> In chapter 3, I have illuminated how women were both targeted as consumers and used as a means to sell television sets, which is an argument that has already been established by various scholars, most recently, Helen Wheatley.<sup>106</sup> It is important to note that the gendering of television began in the commodification process, which, in turn, influenced how it was domesticated. In chapter 5, I have been able to add to this scholarship, by demonstrating the ways in which women were instrumental in creating the ideal viewing environment. Not only were women vital to the acceptance of television and its social regulation in the home, but also in constructing the viewing environment *around* television. In this capacity, women were integral in facilitating the post-war domestic ideals, consuming the goods that would ensure the home was a leisurely, comfortable place, that both looked and felt good. Behind this, however, lay a hidden dimension of female labour. In this equation, the pleasure of viewing belonged to male viewers, guests and children, whose viewing comfort was provided by women. Women's leisure time, if she got any, was dependent upon ensuring all her chores were done, which included facilitating the viewing environment for others. Lynn Spigel found a similar set of circumstances in how television was domesticated in the United States, indicating that the gendered nature of television's domestication was pervasive in both countries.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> See Janet Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture: Men, Women and the Box* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood, eds., *Television for Women: New Directions* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Spigel, *Make Room for TV*.

<sup>106</sup> Helen Wheatley, "Television in the Ideal Home" in *Television for Women: New Directions*, eds. Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 205-222.

<sup>107</sup> Spigel, *Make Room for TV*.

The constructions of the ideal home presented a move towards a leisure-based, comfortable home life, that was flexible and non-hierarchical, in which television would play a key role. I have argued that from this an idealised television lifestyle emerged. However, the leisure and comfort involved in the television lifestyle was not equally accessed; it was facilitated by women's labour and enjoyed by others. From this, this thesis has provided further evidence of how the domestication of television was critically gendered, rooted in the often-invisible labour-relations in the home, in which women were the main providers.

An examination of the domestication of the television set reveals the ways in which television became embedded in various ways in consumer culture, discourses of taste and class, and constructions of gender. By applying theoretical discussions on the meanings of objects historically, it has been possible to excavate the symbiotic and pervasive relationship between television and home, discovering that it is deeply embedded in material culture. I have argued that it is necessary to consider domestication, as it is the key process that shaped how television became part of domesticity. Such a model could then be applied to other media technologies, to further the study of how these move into the commodity state and become part of our everyday domestic lives. Likewise, there are questions to be asked about how television's domestication in Britain differs from, or bears similarity, to other countries. Through Spigel's work it is possible to draw comparisons with the United States, but there is room for a more transnational approach to television's domestication.<sup>108</sup>

As television's medium and object forms continue to evolve in the age of internet television, it might be pertinent to ask where we draw the lines between object, medium and technology.<sup>109</sup> It may be we have to question what aspects of television are now being commodified, and as a

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<sup>108</sup> This would build on the work of scholars such as Andreas Fickers and Anne-Katrin Weber who have advocated for this approach more generally in histories of radio and television.

<sup>109</sup> See Catherine Johnson, *Online TV* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), forthcoming.

result, what implications this has for domestication. Television's domestication is not fixed. I have explored it within a specific historical time frame, but as technology, medium and object change, so too does its relationship to domesticity. I have left this study at the point at which colour television established itself as the dominant way in which television was viewed in 1976, which would undoubtedly be a starting point for research into how television's domestication changed, with the introduction of VHS, a third broadcaster, and the deregulation of media in the 1980s.

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