Prime-Time Society

UPDATED EDITION
To my son,
Nicholas Charles Kottak.

*Live long and prosper.*
Prime-Time Society
An Anthropological Analysis
of Television and Culture

UPDATED EDITION

Conrad Phillip Kottak
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For professional anthropologists it is commonplace to say that anthropological knowledge (or at least conventional anthropological knowledge) begins with the exotic and ends up transforming what was strange, irrational, or simply bizarre into something intelligible and humanly acceptable. This involves a necessary demystification and clarification of the connections between apparent social discontinuities that are often perceived as irreconcilable. It is precisely this gap between the exotic and the familiar that gives rise to what we have traditionally called, perhaps a bit pompously, “anthropological theory.”

It could be said that this has been the characteristic pattern of all the classic anthropological adventures or journeys. In those cases, the researcher must leave his or her own society in order to visit strange lands and experience exotic customs, which, after considerable time and effort, he or she finally manages to discern and understand. The direction of this journey, however, is outward and downward. One meets the “primitives,” seeks out “savages,” wants to live with “Indians,” wishes to interpret customs of “traditional” societies and “underdeveloped” peoples. Our subject matter has been the systematic study of those who are far away, of those less “rich” and modern than we are. We have been trapped in a chalk circle inscribed by restricted anthropological knowledge and concept, by a formula that dictates a process in which the “other” ends up being like us. Then, after the journey and the essays, the other, whether Trobriander or Balinese, remains there, while we are here.

That, it seems to me, is the process that Conrad Kottak resolutely refuses to follow in his pioneering work *Prime-Time Society*. In fact, what he does here is just the opposite. He has decided to take as his object of study television, and with it our own system of representations, and to examine that system through an anthropological lens. Reversing the usual course, he adds a necessary other side to the conventional mode of anthropological understanding. The most interesting aspect of this book is precisely the transformation of the familiar into the exotic. Kottak leads us to distance ourselves from the ordinary world in which we live and that we take as much for granted, and interpret with as little imagination, as the air we
breathe. In studying television in Brazil, Kottak takes a different approach, a risky and original one. He does not adopt the simplistic view that in Brazil the universe of television slavishly mimics a cosmopolitan and universalistic pattern that typifies our system and that television leads, therefore, to the dissolution of cultural differences. Perhaps as a result of knowing from personal experience and academic training that cultural realities are similar on some levels and different on others, Kottak, with intelligent suspicion, reverses the usual course and shows how television itself constitutes, in the case of Brazilian society, a landscape of its own, one that is expressive of the dramas and values of the society in which it functions.

As a result, this book is more than a study based on empirical research. It is also a true epistemological experiment of a sort that few have the courage to attempt. Critically observing the modern anthropological scene, one quickly discovers a kind of fear of the observer’s own cultural universe. When “we” enter the picture, the old anthropological taboo immediately rises in confrontation. Thus, the people who have “culture,” “rituals,” and “values” are the Nuer, the Chinese, and the Brazilians. “We”—that is, North Americans and English—have “customs,” “ceremonies,” and “social sciences.” We should only speak of the other—or of those among and before us who have spoken of the other. We are not supposed to adopt the opposite procedure of speaking of ourselves as others on the basis of observations of parts of our own system in which we can discern something concrete and systematic. If we choose to convert the familiar into the exotic, we adopt an epistemological option that takes us to the circus rather than to the opera, to the movies rather than to the theater—indeed, to our own living rooms, where our TV sets reign, rather than to the writers that history and the critics have consecrated. It’s a matter of taking more seriously, as Prime-Time Society does, that we, too, have a culture. We also live in a society filled with beliefs, rituals, and preconceptions. By following such a path, this book leads us away from being American, transforming us into “Nacirema” (American spelled backward, as in Horace Miner’s famous article “Body Ritual Among the Nacirema”).

This is not an easy process. As a systematic observer of the social life of the United States, I have noted the instantaneous respectability of discourse that cites the Bible, Shakespeare, or some illustrious German or French philosopher. Authors from other worlds do not exist. It remains true, as Clifford Geertz teaches, that anthropological understanding is a dialog between the most particular of particulars and the most universal of universals. But we also know that the universal is socially constructed. Still, we have paid too much attention to singularities and to the exoticism of particulars. We have taken these to be the exclusive object of anthropology. Whether or not one studies primitives has distinguished anthropologists from other social scientists.

Why have we proceeded in this way? This book helps us answer this question through its subject matter and approach. First, there is a tradition of going outward and not inward as Prime-Time Society does. Next, there
is a world system marked by specific ideological values, based on a Puritan-Calvinist individualism that piously affirms the rule of the individual as an axiomatic moral entity. This view, as we learn from the work of Louis Dumont, has consequences. One of them is myopia in viewing value systems in which the whole dominates, in interpreting institutions in which hierarchy and relationships are primary. From this comes a tendency to see everything as dissolving into a cloud lacking form and depth, instead of trying to discover new discontinuities and differences that appear in the world and, in a way, reconstitute the old cultural boundaries. Or, are we really supposed to believe that Arab fundamentalism is simply a matter of interpretation, or that Brazilian nationalism is only a way of writing about Brazil?

But this is not all. Along with the question of the values of a world society, we also have the basic problem of the authority of anthropological knowledge. Studies of our own society help demystify this authority. They do this because in them the ethnologist is not alone. The ethnologist speaks of social phenomena that are part of an experience shared by hundreds, or, in the case of this book, millions of people. This is very different from spending a few months on a Pacific island or studying a lost tribe in the Australian interior (even in a world with jets and computers).

As a student of similar phenomena, I know very well the price one pays for such boldness as Kottak’s. The problem we face is that almost everything that arises in any system tends to be seen from a certain angle or perspective. To describe Brazilian soccer to North Americans, to propose a theory of Rio’s Carnival for the English, or to analyze Brazilian popular music in Paris is very different from doing the same thing in Brazil for Brazilians. In the first case authority resides in the realism of a narrative that has no apparent bias. In the second case, however, the observation tends to be received as trivial or as mere opinion. When studying phenomena that are familiar, that are ours, the anthropologist can no longer whip out the classic line, “But in my tribe it’s different.” In this case authority no longer resides in the singular personal experience of the classic field-worker (alone in “his or her tribe”) but must be won through discussion and exhaustive demonstration of the arguments.

A book about the familiar will also lack a classic type of charm found in orthodox anthropological descriptions, of the boy who was our informant in Morocco or in discussions of Asiatic rituals that cite English philosophers. The anthropologist who studies his or her own society will be closely questioned by readers. He or she is, after all, describing something that everyone knows, experiences, and has an opinion about. Here the anthropologist lacks the dubious benefit and authority of a descriptive narrative that invokes a first time with a tribe or first encounter with a custom. But in compensation, it is through such endeavors that anthropology is effectively democratized. By studying phenomena that are to us “nacre-mally” familiar, we may discover where anthropological theory really helps and where it is only a pompous obstacle to intellectual progress.
Because of all this, I think that *Prime-Time Society* has the merit of initiating a sort of demystification of television, showing how our knowledge about ourselves, despite our rationalistic universe, is also bound by preconceptions that serve our interests. Thus, Brazilian television has not followed the impersonal rules of a supposed American imperialism but has invented its own system of domination, availing itself of authoritarian legislation and a hierarchical society in which the public has too little faith in its own opinion. In this sense Brazilian television is simultaneously a copy and an act of great creativity, as well as (in my opinion as a Brazilian) a mirror of Brazil’s public irresponsibility.

In *Prime-Time Society* Conrad Kottak also shows that there is no exclusivity of productive methods of research and analysis. Effectively combining statistical and structural arguments, he realizes an analysis dominated by the goal of studying a phenomenon culturally. Kottak confronts issues involving academic disciplines and cultural experience. It seems to me that this book demystifies on several levels. It shows how television has multiple and diverse functions and meanings, depending on particular situations and historical moments. The aim, clearly, is to understand how ‘TV represents and expresses Brazil. However, in this study Brazil is not inanimate but a mirror in which Kottak sees himself as an American and as a citizen of the world.

I think, by the way, that this goal of being radically comparative may be the most important feature of *Prime-Time Society*. We need such comparisons to stave off all ethnocentrism, including universalistic and individualistic ones. By realizing his comparative agenda, Kottak manages to liberate television from a bundle of preconceptions, thus revealing it as a powerful cultural object. This object—contradictory, or as is said nowadays, polyphonic—can work in Brazil like a chorus, having a dominant rhythm and harmony. Brazilian ‘TV helps also to maintain hierarchy and to reproduce a very traditional system of power. Such relentless comparison culturally situates the researcher’s own society, creating a mirror through which it can perceive itself more clearly.

For all of this, I believe, the reader will appreciate *Prime-Time Society*, which is written in a clear style that dispenses with the pompous conventions of traditional academic discourse. This book commands attention because, for the first time, it discusses a series of questions that are fundamental to television and to modern society, in the South and in the North.

Roberto DaMatta
University of Notre Dame
Acknowledgments (1990)

Several organizations have supported the research behind this book. I thank them all. The University of Michigan gave me a sabbatical leave in 1983-84, which permitted me to do research in Rio de Janeiro and to plan the rural fieldwork that followed. The Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research also supported that work in Rio with a grant to study the electronic mass media and social change in Brazil (1983-84). I am especially grateful to Dr. Lita Osmundsen, who headed Wenner-Gren at that time, for her encouragement, confidence, and support.

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In Rio de Janeiro, the Department of Social Anthropology of the National Museum, a division of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, gave me an institutional affiliation. The Museum also introduced me to field researchers Rosane Prado and Alberto Costa. At the Museum I developed my friendship with Brazilian anthropologist Roberto DaMatta, who served as Brazilian liaison for the project. I am also grateful to Professors Giralda Seyfurth and Ione Leite and particularly to Professor Gilberto Velho (all of the National Museum) for help with the project.

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Throughout the project, we encountered very few problems. All the researchers had social science training. All were fluent in Brazilian Portuguese. All worked meticulously, conscientiously, and indefatigably. Because other researchers gathered much of the data on which this book is based, I want to emphasize my appreciation to them for their efforts and their friendship.

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Betty Wagley Kottak, my wife, quit a professional job that she liked in order to travel to Brazil with me in 1983-84. I thank her for her support in doing that and for contributing to this project at all stages, including fieldwork in Arembepe. In particular, drawing on her native knowledge of Brazilian culture, and on what we have learned together, Betty spent many days working with me to develop and test the interview schedules on which much of this field research was based.

In Ann Arbor, during data entry and analysis, Barry Cerf consulted on statistical analysis. Linda Swift solved problems with computer hardware and software and typed my field notes. Abdollah Dashti, Edward Potter, Celeste DaMatta, and Iraní Escolano entered our field data.

Iraní deserves special thanks. Not only did she do fieldwork at three of our sites, she was also my research associate in Ann Arbor, where she organized data coding, entry, and analysis.

I am pleased that so many of the people who worked on this project have used it to progress with their own studies. Costa, Escolano, Pace, and Prado have defended master’s theses or doctoral dissertations and written papers based on the project. Roberto DaMatta, Edward Potter, and Joseph Straubhaar have incorporated some of its results in papers. Currently we are preparing an edited volume in which all the researchers describe their work and findings at the community level in much greater detail than I can do in this book.

Since his arrival at the University of Michigan in January 1987, Alberto Costa has read and reread this developing manuscript. He has corrected all kinds of errors. His incisive comments have helped me rethink many key concepts and interpretations. He has been as much my teacher as I have been his.
Special thanks are due Roberto DaMatta, whose ideas have enlivened my own and whose enormous intellectual energy always fuels mine. For the fascinating and continuing lessons he teaches me about Brazil, I am very grateful.

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I dedicate Prime-Time Society to my son Nicholas, who shares my interest in media content and analysis. Nick has always embarked for Brazil, and particularly for its remote villages, with enthusiasm. He visited all the field sites, and in Arembepe he took part in fieldwork on which this book is based. Nick’s interests in film and TV have grown along with mine, and his enthusiasm and insight helped guide me to and through this project.

Conrad Phillip Kottak
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Introduction: Prime-Time Society 20 Years Later

Since its original publication in 1990, I’ve used *Prime-Time Society*, hereafter PTS, as a case study in my course on “Television, Society, and Culture.” Focusing on Brazil, but offering frequent comparisons with the United States, PTS helps me address the goals of that course, which are to:

1. use perspectives from cultural anthropology to analyze television;
2. consider the sociocultural contexts and dimensions of media creation, distribution, reception, and impact;
3. understand how television varies through time and across cultures.

Sharing all those goals, PTS has been an especially effective book for my course. However, it’s been apparent to me for some time that PTS needed updating, so I’m pleased to have the chance to provide such an update here.

This new introduction has three main goals. First, I want to comment on developments in media anthropology since 1990. Second, I want to emphasize what in my opinion are the most important contributions of PTS. Foremost among them is the unique research design that provided three independent measures of exposure to television and allowed me to develop a comparative and historical model of TV’s spread and impact. Finally, I want to comment on how Brazilian television has changed in recent years. A global multi-media revolution has reached Brazil, allowing me to extend the stage model proposed in the previous edition. I comment as well on how globalization, including transnational migration and its televised representations, is playing out for national and diasporic Brazilians.

MEDIA ANTHROPOLOGY

Media anthropology has grown substantially as a field of study during the past twenty years. I know of two excellent anthologies now available for course use (Askew and Wilk, eds., 2002; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin, eds., 2002). Anthropologists Faye Ginsburg (1994) and Lila Abu-Lughod (1997), along with communications researchers Alison Alexander (1993) and Patrick Murphy (1999), have highlighted the need for qualitative and in-depth research, including ethnography, on television and other media. The dominant orientation in media studies (usually based in Departments of Communication) has been quantitative, with survey research and
experiments predominating. Such research strategies, as Murphy (1999) notes, tell us little about how people actually use media and what media mean to them.

PTS is an early example of an ethnographically focused media study. Uniquely, I think, PTS considers, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the creation, distribution, reception, and impact of televised messages. One of its main foci is Brazilian telenovelas, popular nightly serial melodramas often compared to American soap operas. PTS also offers a comparative and historical framework that encompasses both Brazil and the United States. Later media studies with an ethnographic component include Marie Gillespie’s (1995) work with Asian British youth and Stewart Hoover, Lynn Clark, and Diane Alters’ investigation into how American families use media to create their family identities (2004). Ethnography also is a key ingredient in Lara Descartes’ and my recent book Media and Middle Class Moms: Images and Realities of Work and Family (2009), based on field work in a Michigan town.

Abu-Lughod (1997) and Ginsburg (1994) argue that anthropologists are particularly suited to study media because they recognize “‘the complex ways in which people are engaged in processes of making and interpreting media works in relation to their cultural, social and historical circumstances’” (Abu-Lughod 1997:111, citing Ginsburg 1994:13). Many of the studies contained in the two anthologies mentioned previously do focus on how members of various cultures create and interpret media works in terms of their sociocultural and historical circumstances.

However, after reading several articles in the Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin (2002) collection, my students complained about a certain sameness they perceived in those studies. My students saw a tendency for anthropologists to over-interpret and over-theorize and to concentrate too much on the texts, particularly soap operas, to the neglect of the audiences. Cultural distinctiveness gets lost in the use of similar interpretive models for country after country. I suspect my students might have a similar reaction to O. Hugo Benavides’ recent (2008) book Drugs, Thugs, and Divas: Telenovelas and Narco-Dramas in Latin America. During field work in 15 cities in Mexico and Brazil, Benavides spoke with artists, students, and intellectuals and did archival research. Reviewing that book, Cymene Howe (2009) notes that because Benavides did not use participant-observation and ethnographic interviews, “traces of his fieldwork are, at times, difficult to locate in the text.” Furthermore, “the lived experiences of . . . viewers, their . . . engagement with melodrama, the expertise . . . involved in the production of these media spectacles, and details of the economic conditions that allow for their manufacture are not as developed as they might be.”

While I agree that media studies needed something beyond survey research and experiments, it seems to me that recent media anthropology has been relying too heavily on poststructuralist and cultural studies approaches. I would like to see (and to have available for my course) more media studies with greater ethnographic richness—more on how people actually
use media in different local contexts and in their daily lives. Richard Pace’s forthcoming book *Jungle TV*, portions of which I’ve read in manuscript form, based on his ethnographic research in an Amazon town, will help fill this gap.

It also seems to me that some anthropologists now writing about media haven’t actually studied media as their primary research focus. Given the pervasiveness of television, anthropologists inevitably pay some attention to it, even when doing fieldwork on another topic. In writing about media, observations *en passant*, although often insightful, aren’t the same as conclusions based on systematic study. Whatever its faults, *PTS* is based on a research project that made media—specifically television—its primary and systematic focus.

**Research Design**

*PTS* examines Brazilian television at the national, regional, and local levels. After considering production and distribution at the national and regional levels, we (my several Brazilian and American research colleagues, and I) examined reception and impact in six Brazilian communities in different parts of that vast country. Within the realm of TV impact studies, the research design that informed *PTS* is unique, because it offered three different ways of measuring exposure to television: length of site exposure, length of individual exposure, and current viewing habits. (1) Variable site exposure: The first wave of TV sets with good reception reached our six field sites in different years (from 1955 to 1984); the communities in our study thus represented a continuum of exposure to television. (2) Individual exposure: Our respondents began watching television at different times. (3) Current viewing: Our informants had different viewing habits, some being heavy viewers, some watching TV rarely; others, not at all. In some homes, the set remained on almost all day; in others sets were absent, broken, or rarely turned on. Chapters 9-11 in particular offer statistical documentation for multiple effects of televiewing on Brazilians.

**Liberal Attitudes**

One especially interesting finding reported in *PTS* was the strong correlation between TV exposure and liberal views on sex-gender issues (see Chapter 10). Heavier viewers and longer-exposed viewers were strikingly more liberal—less traditional in their opinions on such matters as whether women should work outside the home, frequent bars, and consider divorce, whether men should do domestic chores, and whether parents should talk to their children about sex (See Chong and La Ferrara [2009] for specific links between *telenovelas* and divorce). Such questions elicit TV-biased answers, in that Brazilian television (particularly *telenovelas*) depicts an
urban-modern society in which sex-gender roles are less traditional than in rural communities (see also Benavides 2008).

Our research design permitted us to avoid one huge pitfall of quantitatively oriented TV research in the United States, which routinely uses current viewing level as the best available measure of TV impact. The problem with using this measure is that it cannot easily differentiate cause and effect relationships from mere correlations. Questions like the following always arise: Does watching a lot of television cause people to be fearful of the outside world (as some have claimed)—or is it that already fearful people are more likely to stay home and watch more TV? Effects are clearer when, as in our study, variable length of direct exposure to television in the home can be measured (independently of age of respondent; it is almost impossible to separate those two variables for American viewers, most of whom have had television in their homes since birth). Logically, we can compare home TV exposure and its effects to education and its effects. If the cumulative effects of formal education increase with years of schooling (as most scholars and ordinary people believe they do), then it seems reasonable to assume at least some degree of influence from years of exposure to television, which the findings of PTS confirm.

Compared with TV research in the United States, our research design made it easier for us to separate effects from mere correlations. For example, does Brazilian TV make people more liberal, or do already liberal people, seeking reinforcement for their views, simply watch more television? Do they mine the urban-elite images of Brazilian television for moral options that are missing or suppressed in their own, more traditional, towns? Liberalization, we concluded, is both a correlation and an effect. We found a strong correlation between liberal social views and current viewing hours. Liberal small-town Brazilians turned to TV to validate personal views that their local setting suppressed. However, confirming that long-term TV exposure also has an effect on Brazilians’ attitudes, we found an even stronger correlation between years of home viewing by individuals and their liberal social views.

In Brazil, heavy viewers probably are predisposed to liberal views. However, over time, TV content—especially that of the Globo network’s hugely popular telenovelas—when invited into the home on a daily basis, reinforces and augments those views. TV-biased and TV-reinforced attitudes spread as viewers take courage from the daily validation of their unorthodox (local) views in (national) programming. More and more townsfolk accept non-traditional views as normal.

**TV’s Contraceptive Effect**

One important effect of Brazilian TV—on family planning—became evident only after the publication of *Prime Time Society*, and it deserves special attention here. I first considered the possibility that TV might be affecting Brazilian family size when I read an intriguing article (which I have been
unable to relocate) in The New York Times. That report, based on interviews with Brazilians in the early 1990s, suggested that TV was influencing Brazilians to limit family size. This became an Aha! moment for me when I realized that our research project had collected data that allowed me to test (and, it turned out, to confirm) this hypothesis.

Put simply, the longer the length of TV exposure, the smaller the family. In the three communities in our study exposed to TV the longest, women (with a TV set in their homes for 15 years, on average) averaged 2.3 pregnancies. By contrast, in the three towns where TV arrived most recently, the average woman (with home TV for only 4 years) averaged 5 pregnancies. Although length of site exposure was a clear predictor of female reproductive histories, we recognized as well that the presence of TV in a community reflects that town’s overall access to external systems and resources, including improved methods of contraception. Nevertheless, the impact of long-term home TV exposure on fertility showed up not only when we compared sites, but also within sites, within age cohorts, and among individual women in our total sample.

As TV was influencing Brazilians to limit family size, other factors were working in the same direction. The strongest predictor of (smaller) family size was a woman’s educational level; this finding generally holds true throughout the world. However, we found that two measures of exposure to television (average daily viewing hours and number of years of TV in the home) were better predictors of (smaller) family size than were many other social indicators, including income, social class, and religiosity. What fascinated me in particular was that this effect on family planning was occurring without any concerted, or even conscious, use of television to get Brazilians to limit their progeny. Brazilian TV’s contraceptive effect was totally unplanned. In fact, that TV portrayals might influence family size has been denied vigorously by Brazilian TV executives (see Partlow 2009). In an article I published in 1997, I first suggested some of the mechanisms by which Brazilian television might influence family planning. (Anthropologist Janet Dunn [2000, 2001] later did fieldwork investigating how television actually works in communities to influence reproductive choice and family planning.)

It would be difficult for Brazilian TV to have a contraceptive effect without easily available and effective birth control. Throughout Brazil family planning opportunities (including contraception) are greater now than they used to be. However, as Richard K. Manoff (1994) notes, based on experience in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, readily available contraception does not insure family planning. Often, popular demand must be created—sometimes through “social marketing”—planned multi-media campaigns (Manoff 1994). In Brazil, however, television’s contraceptive effect has little to do with government policy, educational campaigns, or public service announcements. How then has television encouraged Brazilians to plan smaller families?
Brazilian TV families (routinely portrayed on Globo’s very popular nightly *telenovelas*) have fewer children than traditional small-town Brazilians do (see also Partlow 2009). In a recent study, La Eliana Ferrara, Alberto Chong and Suzanne Duryea (2008) report on their content analysis of 115 *telenovelas* broadcast by Globo in the two time slots with highest audience between 1965 and 1999. They found that 72 percent of the main female characters (aged 50 or below) had no children, and 21 percent had only one child.

Narrative form and production costs limit the number of players in each *telenovela* to about 50 characters. *Telenovelas* usually are gender-balanced and include three-generation extended families of different social classes (so that some of the main characters can “rise in life” by marrying up). These narrative conventions limit the number of young children per TV family. Over the years daily TV programming has presented as normal and desirable nuclear families smaller than the traditional family in the communities we studied. The aim of commercial television is to sell products and lifestyles. Brazilian TV families routinely are shown enjoying consumers’ goods and leisureed urban lives—to which viewers learn to aspire. *Telenovelas* may well convey the idea that viewers can enjoy lives like those of their characters if they emulate their apparent family planning. In my 1997 article, building on the findings of *Prime-Time Society*, I interpreted TV’s influence on family planning as a corollary of the more general shift, encouraged by Brazilian television, from traditional toward more liberal social attitudes.

In their 2008 study, using official census data, La Ferrara, Chong and Duryea note that Brazil’s total fertility rate dropped from 6.3 children per woman in 1960 to 2.3 in 2000. These researchers observe that China is the only other major developing country that has witnessed such a sharp and generalized decline—encouraged there by deliberate government policy. The Brazilian government, by contrast, has never promoted a birth control policy. These researchers also investigated and confirmed the role of TV—specifically of Globo’s *telenovelas*—in this Brazilian transition.

They determined when the Globo network had entered various markets between 1970 and 1991 and found that women in areas exposed to Globo had significantly lower fertility than those in areas without the Globo signal. By contrast, the presence of a TV network showing mainly imported shows had no significant effect on fertility, suggesting that Globo’s *telenovelas* specifically—rather than TV in general—were influencing family planning choices. The researchers also reported a trend for people in the Globo areas to name their children after *novela* characters. Finally, they found Globo’s influence to be strongest among women closest in age to the main *telenovela* characters.

**THE STAGE MODEL**

I’ve already emphasized how our research design uniquely provided three different measures of exposure to television. Another key and original contribution of PTS was to offer, rather than a simple stimulus-response
model, a five-stage model of TV impact. (Characteristics of the fifth stage have intensified since the original edition of PTS, as I describe below.) Our Brazilian field sites sampled the first three stages. I used observations of American media to exemplify the last two stages. In Brazil, Gurupá (Pará state), where TV was just arriving during our study period, illustrated Stage I. Arembepe (Bahia state) and Cunha (São Paulo state) were in full Stage II. Ibirama (Santa Catarina state) was in late Stage II, in transition to Stage III. Americana-Santa Barbara (São Paulo state) and Niterói (state of Rio de Janeiro) were in full Stage III.

What are these stages? Stage I describes the arrival of television in a community. During this initial stage, television is novel and strange; people raptly watch any set and image available. The medium rather than the message is the mesmerizer.

Based on his continuing study of Gurupá, the Amazon Town originally studied by Charles Wagley (1976), Richard Pace describes Stage I as follows:

The rule of silence during televiewing was close to absolute. . . A breach of this rule led to immediate reprimand, ranging from hostile stares, hisses, to “quiet down,” to an occasional fecha boca (shut up) (Pace, Jungle TV, Ch. 3).

Furthermore,

I did not observe people engaging in other activities during televiewing. I saw no one partaking in domestic chores, homework, eating, sewing or knitting (Pace, Jungle TV, Ch. 3).

In Stage II, local people become more accustomed to and comfortable with television. Thus begins a process of more selective acceptance and rejection, interpretation, and reworking of TV messages. Pace describes the evolution of televiewing in Gurupá:

Stage II marked the spread of television to greater portions of the population. From approximately 300 sets in 1992, there were well over a 1000 sets in town and countryside by 2005. . . The initial excitement I witnessed in Stage I was now being replaced by more temperate attitudes, although . . . negative attitudes toward television continued to be rare (Pace, Jungle TV, Ch. 3).

Stage II also marked the end of the strict rules of spectatorship:

I did not observe the same mesmerized audiences, silently engrossed in televiewing, eyes fixated on the screen, bodies nearly frozen in place. Silence, for example, was no longer a requirement for televiewing. . . . I observed frequent comments made to others about the program content and story line (Pace, Jungle TV, Ch. 3).

In Stage II, because TV saturation still is only partial, many statistical correlations between viewing and other factors are obvious. We found the
strongest correlations between measures of TV exposure and other variables in our Stage II communities. As long as TV sets have a limited distribution, owning one enhances social status in two ways. First, as a possession, it is a material token of conspicuous consumption. Second and more subtly, television is a source of privileged information. In Ibirama, high-SES people watched TV attentively and frequently because it endowed them with special information. By disseminating this, they gained prestige and authority.

In Stage III, as they saturate a community, TV sets eventually lose their novelty and distinction. With the loss of its status-enhancing value, dismissive comments about television increase. Once TV reaches most homes in a locale, statistical measures of its impact also become less evident. This is because as a phenomenon pervades a community, its presence differentiates less and less among residents. However, this third stage—during which TV impact apparently is least, in terms of a standard set of statistical measures—actually has a subtle, though powerful, impact. Its legacy is a fourth stage—represented by Americans of the baby-boom generation and younger.

In Stage IV, perhaps most evident in the United States during the 1970s and early 1980s, television becomes a powerful national agent of mass enculturation. Stage IV describes the continuing and lifelong impact of viewing on full-grown natives who have spent their entire lives in a national culture pervaded by TV. During this fourth phase the more profound and long-term sociocultural effects of television, which I describe in Chapter 1, become discernible.

In Stage V, our current age of media proliferation and diversification, television transforms from agent of mass enculturation into technologies of segmental appeal. The epilogue of PTS focuses on an electronic revolution, already evident in 1990, that was opening myriad new links between American homes and the outside world. Along with video recorders, cable and satellite were offering more options than ever before in the use of television. Stage V is marked by greatly increased diversity and activity in audience-TV interactions. Already in the United States in 1990, new technology was permitting the ordinary viewer to seize control of the means of production, distribution, and consumption of TV content. This process started to reach Brazil during the 1990s and is fully evident today, especially in urban areas. Stage V has only intensified in the United States and elsewhere in the past 20 years, with the spread of the Internet and means of accessing it.

Stage V television has become more like movies, radio, and magazines in gearing its topics, formats and subjects more toward particular segments of the population (target audiences) than toward a mass audience. Cable, satellite, the Internet, and such allied devices as DVRs and smart phones have allowed viewers to stray from the broadcast networks’ cherished mass audiences toward specialized and personally chosen media consumption.

The Stage V media consumer is much more active, exerting greater control over, and interacting more with, media than previously. Recorders of various sorts allow people to manipulate messages, skip commercials,
Introduction: Prime-Time Society 20 Years Later

and do their own programming and scheduling. More easily than ever, we capture and share features and moments of our own lives. Through the new media technology we can work out to an exercise program on TV, DVD, DVR, or Nintendo Wii, play a videogame, surf the Internet, watch or make a YouTube video, or upload personalized content to Facebook. It has become routine to monitor several channels simultaneously with a remote control device—another key instrument of viewer liberation.

When PTS first was published in 1990, not only VCRs (remember them?) but even color televisions were sufficiently uncommon in Brazil to be prestigious. Brazil’s consumer economy, which typically lags the United States by a few years, has caught up rapidly since 1990. The media market available to Brazilians who can afford it has become much more differentiated. Those of middle class status and above now watch Brazilian versions of MTV and Big Brother. Access to cable and satellite brings them BBC, CNN, Fox News, and even untranslated entertainment programming direct from U. S. channels. One example is American Idol, whose Brazilian transmission lags the American showing by several weeks. The lower classes, with fewer options, are more likely still to be stuck with basic broadcast TV.

Various scholars (e.g., Hamburger [2009]) have noted a declining role for Globo’s telenovelas in 21st century Brazil. As has been true of broadcast TV in the United States, this would be an expectable consequence of increasing variety in media availability, especially among elites and in cities, as Stage V spreads in Brazil. Nonetheless, Globo’s telenovelas remain very popular in places with limited media access, such as Gurupá (where only Globo is available without a private satellite dish), even if viewers no longer accord them the rapt attention they once received. When Pace (2009) asked Gurupâenses to name their favorite program types in 1986, 1999, and 2007, the percentage naming telenovelas actually rose from 42 percent in 1986 to 44 percent in 1999 and 54 percent in 2007.

NATION AND WORLD: THE GLOBALIZATION OF BRAZILIAN TELEVISION

Our original study documented how television allowed formerly-isolated rural Brazilians to embark on an adventure of instantaneous national participation. Our informants again and again made the point that TV brings knowledge of the outside world. Indeed, it was apparent to us that post-TV Brazilians became much more aware of national and global events than previously. For example, as Pace (2009) observed in Gurupá,

As TV spread, the conversations I heard became more diverse and more cosmopolitan. Events in North America, Europe, and the Middle East were discussed in detail. National politics were scrutinized. I
found myself discussing the goals of the American space program, the ideology of then President Reagan, poverty in the United States, international terrorism, and the geophysical causes of earthquakes (Pace, Jungle TV, Ch. 3).

In subsequent years, television has allowed Brazilians to follow their compatriots as they have emigrated worldwide (see Margolis 2009). The Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Relations (2008) estimates that between 2.1 and 3.7 million Brazilians were living outside Brazil in 2007. Of those, between 900,000 and 1.5 million were in North America (mainly the United States), 500,000 to 1 million in Europe, over 300,000 in Asia (mainly Japan), and between 300,000 and 800,000 in other parts of South America (mainly Paraguay). Brazilian viewers can track the experiences of their compatriots in this diaspora, even as expatriate Brazilians with access to satellite TV can watch the latest telenovela in Goose Creek, South Carolina or Nagoya, Japan (both are diasporic sites). Globo’s satellite viewers in the United States (including this author) can watch U.S.-based commercials touting dentists, eye doctors, beauty services, Brazilian food stores, restaurants, and moving companies. These ads are aimed directly at Brazilians living in (in my case the east coast of) the United States. The locales where the advertised services are available, such as New Jersey, Miami, and Massachusetts, offer clues about where Brazilians cluster in the U.S. Available internationally through satellite, Globo now offers its own separate soccer channel. Throughout the diaspora, any bar or restaurant catering to Brazilians will feature a large-screen TV showing sports events (especially soccer), Brazilian musical shows, or telenovelas.

Globo, still the dominant Brazilian network, nationally and internationally, continues to promote the idea that a distinctive Brazilian nationality, lifestyle, and world view exist in a globalizing world. Based on his field work in Gurupá, Pace (2009) describes how televised messages with an international focus contribute to the formation of pan-Brazilian identity. Whether it was Brazil’s opposition to the U.S.-led war in Iraq or a disputed call against the Brazilian team in the World Cup soccer competition, opinions varied little from Pace’s Amazon town to downtown São Paulo. During Pace’s 2005 fieldwork (see Pace 2009), the hit Globo telenovela that year, titled America, was portraying the experiences of an undocumented Brazilian woman working in the United States. Gurupáenses, more attuned than ever before to cultural differences, had learned to contrast “Brazilian ways” (jeitos brasileiros), with “local ways” (costumes daqui), both distinguished from “American ways.” Each time Pace has worked in Gurupá, he has asked people there about their ideal place to live. The percentage naming the United States rose from 20% in 1999 to 62% in 2007, mainly because of the telenovela just mentioned. For the first time local people had been able to see, within the familiar telenovela idiom, portrayals of a North American lifestyle, featuring levels of affluence and opportu-
Community that contrasted sharply with television’s depiction of life in Brazil and their own experiences in Gurupá. While almost all the remaining 38% of his 2007 respondents still considered Gurupá their ideal place to live, no one chose Rio de Janeiro, traditionally the favored setting for *telenovelas* (Pace 2009). Frequent news reports and images of crime in large Brazilian cities offset whatever glamor *telenovelas* might suggest.

Asked to comment on his impressions of 21st century Brazilian TV, anthropologist Daniel Gross (personal communication) observes:

There is always an implicit comparison of things Brazilian to things American and, frequently, invidious comparisons are made. Often, U.S. conditions are idealized, with the intention of showing how bad things are in Brazil.

He sees this as part of Globo’s strategy to support modernization.

As Globo becomes ever more Global, international comparisons have been extended to other countries. A *telenovela* sensation in 2009 was “Caminho das Indias” (Passage to India), set in Brazil and India, and showing travel and migration between the two countries. Again in the familiar *telenovela* idiom, Indian families were portrayed in lavish homes and enjoying lifestyles comparable to those of wealthy *cariocas* (residents of Rio de Janeiro). Most shocking to an American or Canadian, accustomed as we are to the growing Asian segment of our national populations, all the Indians were played by typical Brazilians displaying no phenotypical trace of East Indian ancestry. Architecture, costumes, jewelry, dabbed foreheads, and background Indian street scenes replete with sacred cattle, converted the Brazilian actors, speaking unaccented Portuguese, into Indians. Beneath a modernist veneer of Skyping and blogging, familiar portrayals of unfulfilled love, conflicts between in-laws and generations, class mobility through strategic marriages, small families, and tradition versus modernity were transferred directly from Brazilian to Indian urban settings, as American popular songs enriched the soundtrack. Replacing the common *telenovela* expletives “Nossa Senhora” (Our Lady) and “Meu Deus” (My God), the Indianized Brazilian actors routinely, and inexplicably, uttered a string of “Ali Babas” in comparable situations. As always, the currently dominant *telenovela* inspires local people throughout Brazil and its diaspora to discuss non-local—in this case foreign—themes, such as India’s caste system and whether elephants still roam the streets (see Partlow 2009).

The physical homogeneity of the Brazilian actors in Caminho das Indias highlights a continuing contrast between Brazil and North America. In matters of ethnic diversity, the multicultural model that increasingly characterizes the United States and Canada (see Kottak and Kozaitis 2008) has made some inroads in Brazil, but it hasn’t obliterated Brazilian assimilationism. Brazilians still think of their nation as one founded by three “races”: Portuguese, African, and Native American, with later immigration by other Europeans (e.g., Germans and Italians), Japanese, and Mid-eastern-
ers—all of whom have been expected to assimilate to the dominant Brazilian language and culture. To be sure, Brazil has been affected by international movements for pan-national identities, such as the African diaspora movement and organization for indigenous rights, including those of Brazilian Indian tribes. The pan-African sensibility of many darker-skinned Brazilians has been raised in the past two decades, and an affirmative action program has reached Brazilian universities. Brazilians are more willing now than they used to be to admit that discrimination against darker-skinned people reflects not just class, but color as well, and to consider ways of redressing racial prejudice and discrimination. Despite its multicultural trappings, Caminho das Indias, with its physically homogeneous cast, is an exception to a trend toward inclusion of more Afro-Brazilians in TV content. Several Globo programs, including other popular telenovelas I watched in 2009, contain prominent Afro-Brazilian characters in more than supporting (if not exactly starring) roles. In the past, blacks were there as maids, cooks, chauffeurs, and marginals. Now they are veterinarians, physicians, society women, and love interests for male and female actors of lighter hue. More than in the past, Globo portrays a land of multiracial assimilation, opportunity, and achievement. This vision is much closer to the traditional idealized view of Brazilian race relations than was the televised Prime-Time Society I described in 1990.

**Change and the Future**

To write this introduction, I needed to re-familiarize myself with Brazilian television. What has changed and what has remained the same? The biggest changes, already discussed, can be summarized: Stage V multi-media diversification has reached Brazil, Globo’s hegemony has declined somewhat even as Globo has gone global, and affirmative action has come to Brazilian TV. Another difference I noted is how, perhaps emulating American style cable TV, news is more ubiquitous, spilling out from programmed “news hours” into flashes and segments (e.g., on the H1N1 flu) within entertainment programming. I also noticed a more concerted attempt in the news to include reporting from all regions of the country, reinforcing the notion of Brazil as a nation facing common problems.

Striking to me as well is what hasn’t changed. Beneath a higher-tech, more global, surface, I had no trouble recognizing familiar formulas in Globo’s telenovelas (see Chapter 5). The same social statuses and roles, including three-generation families and class contrasts, are still there. Status mobility, intergenerational conflict, and the fragility of love and marriage are enduring themes—whether the elite is a landowner, industrialist, or maharajah. In a country that (rightfully) prides itself on the beauty of its people, an unending supply of attractive young male and female actors replaces those of the past, some of whom have aged gracefully (many with a lot of help) into older roles in today’s telenovelas.
What of the future? With the worldwide economic contraction of 2008-2009, more Brazilians are returning home, and TV will chronicle their movements. Brazil is a populous and powerful nation with an attractive and tenacious culture. The global influence and presence of Brazil and Brazilians can only increase in the 21st century. No doubt there will be further booms and busts in the global economy and ebbs and flows in international migration. The electronic mass media, and Brazilian TV in particular, will continue to depict those movements and reversals, to link people within nations and diasporas, and to diffuse their cultural products. The power of today's mediascape—increasingly global in reach—has not been diminished by the Stage V fissures in Prime-Time Society.

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Although my old acknowledgment section still stands, I want to add some new names, thanks, and comments here. Neither my interest in media nor my research in Brazil ended with the original publication of *Prime-Time Society.* Indeed, I’ve returned to Brazil for field work nine times since 1990 and have paid attention to developments in media during each of those stays. During the early and mid 1990s I was fortunate to work again with Alberto Costa and Rosane Prado, two of my collaborators on the television study, on two new research projects. One examined the role of the media (and other factors) in developing Brazilian ecological awareness and environmental risk perception. The other focused on participatory development initiatives in northeastern Brazil. Alberto’s and Rosane’s perceptions still illuminate the way I think about Brazil.

I consulted with several other friends and colleagues, especially those working in Brazil or with television (or both), to help me plan this update of *Prime-Time Society.* Richard Pace, who contributed so much to the first edition through his field research in Gurupá, has returned there several times since the 1980s, focusing on social change in general and the evolution of TV in particular. Richard shared with me relevant parts of his book manuscript in preparation, tentatively titled *Jungle TV.* His observations therein, along with his 2009 article in the *American Anthropologist,* gave me valuable information on how TV has changed as it is received and used in local communities.

Dan Gross, who, as an anthropologist working for the World Bank, visits Brazil as often as anyone I know, shared with me several of his impressions of how Brazilian TV programming and content has changed since PTS first was published. John Collins also made useful observations, and I thank him for the sources he suggested. My work on media in Dexter, Michigan with Lara Descartes (see Descartes and Kottak 2009) helped me rethink various aspects of my original analysis of Brazilian TV. I’ve followed Maxine Margolis’s work on Brazilian immigration for years. I thank her for reading a draft of the new introduction to PTS and giving me feedback and her own observations concerning Brazilians and television.
I’m grateful to the LS&A Dean’s office at the University of Michigan for providing a research fund that has supported my most recent trips to Brazil. Conversations with Roberto Da Matta over the years always enlighten me about Brazil, the United States, and culture in general.

Isabel (Betty) Wagley Kottak continues to accompany me as I study and experience all things Brazilian. I thank her for her continuing loyalty and her help in Brazilian settings, including our ongoing study of Arembepe, Bahia. My son Nicholas, to whom PTS is dedicated, is a skilled ethnographer and cultural analyst in his own right. Nick, now with his own Ph.D. in anthropology, retains his interest in media content and analysis. Check out our website at www.ethnographic-solutions.com. Luckily as well, I now have grandchildren who help me understand what a new generation will take from and bring to television.

Thanks finally to Mitch Allen for commissioning this updated edition. It’s a pleasure to be publishing with Left Coast Press, Inc.

Conrad Phillip Kottak

Johns Island, SC

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About the Author

Conrad Phillip Kottak is the Julian H. Steward Collegiate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan. He served as Anthropology Department Chair from 1996 to 2006. In 1999 the American Anthropological Association (AAA) awarded Professor Kottak the AAA/Mayfield Award for Excellence in the Undergraduate Teaching of Anthropology. In 2005 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and in 2008, to the National Academy of Sciences.

Kottak has done ethnographic fieldwork in, and written extensively about, Brazil (since 1962), Madagascar (since 1966), and the United States. His general interests are in the processes by which local cultures are incorporated into larger systems. This interest links his earlier work on ecology and state formation in Africa and Madagascar to his more recent research on global change, national and international culture, and the mass media.

In a research project during the mid-1980s, Kottak combined ethnography and survey research to study “Television’s Behavioral Effects in Brazil.” That research (supplemented by several follow-ups) is the basis of his recently updated edition (for Left Coast Press) of Prime-Time Society: An Anthropological Analysis of Television and Culture—a comparative study of the nature, impact, and evolution of television in Brazil and the United States.

Kottak’s Brazilian research also is highlighted in Assault on Paradise: The Globalization of a Little Community in Brazil (4th ed. 2006) based on his ongoing research in Arembepe, Bahia. His newest book (2009, with senior author Lara Descartes) is Media and Middle Class Moms: Images and Realities of Work and Family. Kottak also authors several successful anthropology texts, revised regularly and published by McGraw-Hill.
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Television and Culture
CHAPTER ONE

Television and Cultural Behavior

Why should a cultural anthropologist, trained to study primitive societies, be interested in television, which is the creation of a complex, industrial society? My interest in television's impact on human social behavior arose mainly through contacts with young Americans. These include my children, their friends, and particularly the college students at the University of Michigan to whom I have been teaching introductory anthropology since 1968.

I teach my introductory course, which enrolls 600 students a semester, in a large auditorium. A microphone is necessary if the perennial instructor wants to avoid cancer of the larynx. One or two semesters a year, I stand on a stage in front of these massed undergraduates. In 13–14 weeks of lecturing I survey the field of anthropology, one of the broadest in the college curriculum. I cover not only cultural anthropology, which is my own specialty, but also the other three subdisciplines—prehistoric archeology, biological anthropology, and anthropological linguistics. Introductory anthropology is among the first courses taken at Michigan. Many students take it to satisfy their social science distribution requirement. Most do not plan to major in anthropology, and many will never take another anthropology course.

For these reasons, the lecturer must work hard to keep students' attention, and my evaluations usually give me good marks for making lectures interesting. However, students in this setting perceive a successful lecturer not simply as a teacher, but as something of an entertainer. My efforts to keep them interested sometimes have the side effect of creating a less formal and more relaxed atmosphere than is usual in a lecture. The combination of large lecture hall, electronic voice amplification, and relative informality sometimes prompts students to relax too much for my taste. Nevertheless, changes in students' behavior over the past decade, particularly their more relaxed classroom comportment, helped turn my attention to television's effects on human behavior.

TELECONDITIONING

Most of the freshmen I have taught during the past decade were born after 1955. They belong to the first generation raised after the almost total
diffusion of television into the American home. Most of these young Americans have never known a world without TV. The tube has been as much a fixture in their homes as mom or dad. Considering how common divorce has become, the TV set even outlasts the father in many homes. American kids now devote 22–30 hours to television each week. By the end of high school, they will have spent 22,000 hours in front of the set, versus only 11,000 in the classroom (Ann Arbor News 1985b). Such prolonged exposure must modify Americans' behavior in several ways.

I have discussed the behavior modification I see in my classroom with university colleagues, and many say they have observed similar changes in students' conduct. The thesis to be defended in this book is somewhat different from those of other studies about television's effects on behavior. Previous researchers have found links between exposure to media content (for example, violence) and individual behavior (hyperactivity, aggression, "acting out"). I also believe that content affects behavior. However, I make a more basic claim: The very habit of watching television has modified the behavior of Americans who have grown up with the tube.

Anyone who has been to a movie house recently has seen examples of TV-conditioned behavior—teleconditioning. People talk, babies cry, members of the audience file in and out getting snacks and going to the bathroom. Students act similarly in college courses. A decade ago, there was always an isolated student who did these kinds of things. What is new is a behavior pattern, characteristic of a group rather than an individual. This cultural pattern is becoming more and more pronounced, and I link it directly to televiewing. Stated simply, the pattern is this: Televiewing causes people to duplicate inappropriately, in other areas of their lives, behavior styles developed while watching television.

Some examples are in order. Almost nothing bothers professors more than having someone read a newspaper in class. If lecturers take their message and teaching responsibilities seriously, they are understandably perturbed when a student shows more interest in a sports column or "Doonesbury." I don't often get newspapers in class, but one day I noticed a student sitting in the front row reading a paperback novel. Irritated by her audacity, I stopped lecturing and asked "Why are you reading a book in my class?" Her answer: "Oh, I'm not in your class. I just came in here to read my book." How is this improbable response explained? Why would someone take the trouble to come into a classroom in order to read? The answer, I think, is this: Because of televiewing, many young Americans have trouble reading unless they have background noise. Research confirms that most Americans do something else while watching television. Often they read. Even I do it. When I get home from work I often turn on the television set, sit down in a comfortable chair, and go through the mail or read the newspaper.¹

Research on television's impact in other countries confirms that televiewing evolves through certain stages (see Chapter 9). The first stage,
when sets are introduced, is rapt attention, gazes glued to the screen. Some of us can remember from the late 1940s and 1950s sitting in front of our first TV, dumbly watching even test patterns. Later, as the novelty diminishes, viewers become progressively less attentive. Televiwers in Brazil, whom I began studying systematically in 1983, had already moved past the first stage, but they were still much more attentive than Americans.

A study done in Brazil's largest city, São Paulo, illustrates the contrast. The study shocked Rede Globo, Brazil's dominant network (and the most watched commercial TV network in the world). It revealed that half the viewers were not paying full attention when commercials were shown. Afraid of losing advertising revenues, Rede Globo attacked the accuracy of the research. American sponsors are so accustomed to inattention and, nowadays, to remote control tune-outs, that it would probably delight them if even half the audience stayed put.

The student who came to my class to read her novel was simply an extreme example of a culture pattern derived from television. Because of her lifelong TV dependency, she had trouble reading without background noise. It didn't matter to her whether the background hum came from a stereo, a TV set, or a live professor. Accustomed to machines that don't talk back, she probably was amazed that I noticed her at all. Perhaps my questioning even prompted her to check her set that night to see if someone real was lurking inside.

Another example of a televiewing effect is students' increasing tendency to enter and leave classrooms at will. Of course, individual students do occasionally get sick or have a dentist's appointment. But here again I'm describing a group pattern rather than individual idiosyncrasies. Only during the past few years have I regularly observed students getting up in mid-lecture, leaving the room for a few minutes, then returning. Sometimes they bring back a canned soft drink.

These students intend no disrespect. They are simply transferring a home-grown pattern of snack-and-bathroom break from family room to classroom. They perceive nothing unusual in acting the same way in front of a live speaker and fellow students as they do when they watch television. (A few students manage to remain seated for only 10–15 minutes. Then they get up and leave the classroom. They are exhibiting a less flattering pattern. Either they have diarrhea, as one student told me he did, or they have decided to shut off the "set" or "change channels.")

Today, almost all Americans talk while watching television. Talking is becoming more common in the classroom, as in the movie house, and this also illustrates television's effects on our collective behavior. Not only do my students bring food and drink to class, some lie down on the floor if they arrive too late to get a seat. I have even seen couples kissing and caressing just a few rows away.

New examples of teleconditioning pop up all the time. In each of the past two semesters I've taught introductory anthropology, at least one student has requested that I say publicly "Happy Birthday" to a friend in
the class. These students seem to perceive me as a professorial analog of Willard Scott, NBC's *Today* show weatherman, who offers birthday greetings (to people 100 and over). Long ago I put into my syllabus injunctions against reading newspapers and eating crunchy foods in class. Last semester I felt compelled to announce that I “don’t do birthdays.”

All these are examples of effects of televiwing on social behavior of young Americans. They are not individual idiosyncrasies (the subject matter of psychology) but new *culture patterns* that have emerged since the 1950s. As such they are appropriate objects for anthropological analysis. *Culture*, as defined by anthropologists, consists of knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, expectations, values, and patterns of behavior that people learn by growing up in a given society. Above all else, culture consists of *shared* learning. In contrast to education, it extends well beyond what we learn in school, to encompass everything we learn in life. Much of the information that contemporary Americans share comes from their common exposure to the mass media, particularly television.

**TV CONTENT'S CULTURAL IMPACT**

TV content's impact on American culture enters the story when we consider that contemporary Americans share common information and experiences because of the programs they have seen. Again, I learn from my students. The subject matter of introductory anthropology includes the kinship systems of the United States and other societies. One habit I acquired about five years ago takes advantage of my students' familiarity with television. My practice is to illustrate changes in American family structure and household organization by contrasting television programs of the 1950s with more recent examples.

Three decades ago, the usual TV family was a nuclear family consisting of employed father (who often knew best), homemaker mother, and children. Examples include *Father Knows Best*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, and *Leave It to Beaver*. These programs, which were appropriate for the 1950s, are out of sync with the social and economic realities of the late 1980s. Only 16 million American women worked outside the home in 1950, compared with three times that number today. By the mid-1980s, fewer than 10 percent of American households had the composition that was once considered normal: breadwinner father, homemaker mother, and two children. Still, today's college students remain knowledgeable about these 1950s shows through syndicated reruns. Afternoon television is a pop culture museum that familiarizes kids with many of the same images, characters, and tales that their parents saw in recent days of yore.

Virtually all my students have seen reruns of the series *The Brady Bunch*. Its family organization provides an interesting contrast with earlier programs. It illustrates what anthropologists call “blended family organization.” A new (blended) family forms when a widow with three daughters
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marries a widower with three sons. Blended families have been increasing in American society because of more frequent divorce and remarriage. However, a first spouse's death may also lead to a blended family, as in The Brady Bunch. During The Brady Bunch's first run, divorce remained controversial and thus could not give rise to the Brady household.

The occupation of Mike, the Brady husband-father, a successful architect, illustrates a trend toward upper-middle-class jobs and life-styles that continues on American television today. TV families tend to be more professional, more successful, and richer than the average real-life family (Pearl et al. 1982). More recent examples include the Huxtables (The Cosby Show) and the Keatons (Family Ties). There are also ultra-rich night-time soap families such as the Carringtons of Dynasty and the Ewings of Dallas. Mike and Carol Brady were wealthy enough to employ a housekeeper, Alice. Mirroring American culture when the program was made, the career of the wife-mother was part time and subsidiary, if it existed at all. Back then, women like Carol Brady who had been lucky enough to find a wealthy husband didn't compete with other women—even professional housekeepers—in the work force.

I use familiar examples like The Brady Bunch to teach students how to draw the genealogies and kinship diagrams that anthropologists use routinely in fieldwork and in making cross-cultural comparisons. TV family relationships may be represented with the same symbols and genealogical charts used for the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert of southern Africa, or any other society. In particular, I chart changes in American family organization, showing how real-life changes have been reflected in television content, with which students tend to be familiar. The Brady Bunch, for example, illustrates a trend toward showing nontraditional families and households. We also see this trend in day-time soaps and in prime time, with the marital breakups, reconciliations, and extended family relationships of Dallas, Dynasty, Falcon Crest, and Knot's Landing. The trend toward newer household types is also obvious in Kate & Allie and The Golden Girls.

Students enjoy learning about anthropological techniques with culturally familiar examples. Each time I begin my kinship lecture, a few people in the class immediately recognize (from reruns) the nuclear families of the 1950s. They know the names of all the Cleavers—Ward, June, Wally, and Beaver. However, when I begin diagramming the Bradys, my students can't contain themselves. They start shouting out "Jan," "Bobby," "Greg," "Cindy," "Marsha," "Peter," "Mike," "Carol," "Alice." The response mounts. By the time we get to Carol and Alice, almost everyone is taking part in my blackboard kinship chart. Whenever I give my Brady Bunch lecture, Anthropology 101 resembles a revival meeting. Hundreds of young natives shout out in unison names made almost as familiar as their parents' through television reruns.

As the natives take up this chant—learned by growing up in post-1950s America—there is an enthusiasm, a warm glow, that my course will not
recapture until next semester's rerun of my Brady Bunch lecture. It is as though my students find nirvana, religious ecstasy, through their collective remembrance of the Bradys, in the ritual-like incantation of their names.

Given my own classroom experiences, I was hardly surprised to read that in a 1986 survey of 1550 American adults, more people said they got pleasure from TV than from sex, food, liquor, money, or religion. In that survey (TV Guide 1986b), people indicated which of the following "give you a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction." The percentages were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping others</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacations</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbies</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual relationships</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Furthermore, when people were asked what they liked to do for relaxation, watching TV again topped the list, followed by just relaxing and doing nothing, vacationing, music, reading and going out to eat. Sex and religion were each chosen by a mere one percent" (TV Guide 1986b:A1).

THE CULTURAL DIMENSION

I often wonder how my more traditional colleagues in anthropology have managed to avoid becoming interested in television—so striking are the behavioral modifications it has wrought in the natives we see and talk to most frequently: our fellow citizens in modern society. Nationwide and ubiquitous, television cuts across demographic boundaries. It presents to diverse groups a set of common symbols, vocabularies, information, and shared experiences (Hirsch 1979:251). Televiewing encompasses men and women of different ages, colors, classes, ethnic groups, and levels of educational achievement. Television is seen in cities, suburbs, towns, and country—by farmers, factory workers, and philosophers (although the last may be loath to admit it).

Television is stigmatized as trivial by many people (particularly orthodox intellectuals). However, it is hardly trivial that the average American household has more television sets (2.2 per home) than bathrooms (USA Today Feb. 14, 1985:B1). Given the level of television's penetration of the
modern home, we should hardly ignore its effects on socialization and enculturation. The common information that members of a mass society come to share as a result of watching the same thing is indisputably culture as anthropologists use the term. This anthropological definition of culture encompasses a much broader spectrum of human life than the definition that focuses on “high culture” — refinement, cultivation, taste, sophistication, education, and appreciation of the fine arts. From the anthropological perspective, not just university graduates, but all people are cultured.

Anthropology’s subject matter must include features of modern culture that some regard as too trivial to be worthy of serious study, such as commercial television. As a cultural product and manifestation, a rock star may be as interesting as a symphony conductor, a comic book as significant as a book-award winner. It is axiomatic in anthropology that the most significant cultural forces are those that affect us every day of our lives. Particularly important are those features influencing children during enculturation—the process whereby one grows up in a particular society and absorbs its culture.

Culture is collective, shared, meaningful. It is transmitted by conscious and unconscious learning experiences. People acquire it not through their genes, but as a result of growing up in a particular society. Hundreds of culture-bearers have passed through the Anthropology 101 classroom over the past decade. Many have been unable to recall the full names of their parents’ first cousins. Some have forgotten a grandmother’s maiden name, and few contemporary students know many Biblical or Shakespearean characters. Most, however, have no trouble identifying names and relationships in mythical families that exist only in televisionland.

As the Bible, Shakespeare, and classical mythology did in the past, television influences the names we bestow on our children and answer to all our lives. For example, “Jaime” rose from 70th to 10th most popular girl’s name within two years of the debut of The Bionic Woman, whose title character was Jaime Sommers. The first name of the program’s star, Lindsay Wagner, also became popular. Charlie’s Angels boosted “Tiffany” and “Sabrina.” Younger kids are named “Blake,” “Alexis,” “Fallon,” and “Krystle” (spellings vary) after Dynasty’s Carringtons (Myers 1985). In other cultures children still receive names of gods (Jesus, Mohammed) and heroes (Ulysses). The comparably honored Olympians of contemporary America lead their glamorous, superhuman lives not on a mountain-top, but in a small square box. We don’t even have to go to church to worship them, because we can count on them to come to us in weekly visitations.

Psychologists are still debating the precise effects of television on individual behavior and psychopathology; TV murders and car chases may indeed influence kids toward aggressive or destructive behavior. However, television’s cultural effects are indubitable. Examples of the medium’s impact on U.S. culture—on the collective behavior and knowledge of
contemporary Americans—are everywhere. One task of this book is to uncover and analyze these examples.

My conclusions about television can be summarized as follows: New culture patterns related to television's penetration of the American home have emerged since the 1950s. As technology, television affects collective behavior, as people duplicate, in many areas of their lives, habits developed while watching TV. Television content also influences mass culture because it provides widely shared common knowledge, beliefs, and expectations.

I became interested in television because I saw that its effects are comparable to those of humanity's most powerful traditional institutions—family, church, state, and education. Television is creating new cultural experiences and meanings. It is capable of producing intense, often irrationally based, feelings of solidarity and communitas ("community feeling") shared widely by people who have grown up within the same cultural tradition. Nothing so important to natives could long escape the eye of the anthropologist.

Intrigued by the television-conditioned behavior around me, I started reading about television's effects on human beings. The next chapter summarizes what I discovered from previous research and explains why I decided to extend my interest in television to the Western Hemisphere's second largest nation—Brazil, home of the world's most watched commercial TV network.
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