Sonia Livingstone and **Ranjana Das**

Interpretation/reception

Book section

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Introduction

Interpretation refers to the way in which people make sense of their lives and the events, actors, processes, and texts that they encounter. This sense making is contextually resourced and often context dependent. Interpretation is taken to encompass any or all of understanding, comprehension, perception or simply grasping in order to make sense of something. In what follows, the interconnected concepts of interpretation and reception are examined through the lens of "reception studies" in communication and cultural studies, which contextualize the active role of readers and viewers within the wider circuit of culture This approach conceives of the production and reproduction of meaning at the levels of the macro (political economic), meso (groups, communities), and micro (everyday lifeworld) as part of a dynamic and mutually reinforcing cycle, in contrast with the linearity of the sender-message-receiver model more commonly adopted in audience research. The concept of interpretation lies at the heart of a range of different disciplines. It draws particularly on philosophy and later the literary humanities, in which scholars have theorized the nature and role of people's understandings in everyday life, as well as the interpretation of literary texts. Interpretation has found a place in history, theology, anthropology, sociology, art, and linguistics, among other fields. It has even occupied the interests of cognitive researchers, who have often been criticized for reducing the question of interpretation to purely individual differences. The pursuit of interpretation as an empirical project within media and communication studies began in the face of the problematic aspects of interpretation being ignored in the heyday of propositions about either powerful texts or powerful media effects. While uses and gratifications research was initially seen as a counter to effects research, this counter in turn was criticized for a host of reasons, not least among which was its individualistic approach to audience motivation and the neglect of audiences' interpretative task of engaging with texts (rather than, more simply, responding to stimuli). An impetus came from cultural studies, especially from feminist traditions and ethnographic methods through the 1980s and 1990s, in which interpretative work was contextualized within relations of structure and power. But the empirical effort was strongly sociological and socio-psychological (initially—later it was also influenced by anthropological approaches) and required the development of new methods of investigation within the private lifeworld of the audience.

Core Texts

Reception studies share with other hermeneutic approaches to research the fundamental assumption that the meaning of a message—including all forms of media message—is not

fixed or pre-given but must be interpreted by its recipient. Fiske <u>1987</u> is an important reference point for reception studies, for it outlines one of the field's central arguments, that meaning, crucially, is considered to emerge from the context-dependent interaction between a polysemic text and an interpretative reader (Fiske <u>1987</u>), something the author extends later in his use of the term "audiencing" (Fiske <u>1992</u>). Eco <u>1979</u> is a theoretical account of reception rooted in semiotic theory, in which Eco theorizes interpretation and reception as processes of meaning construction centered on the interaction between texts. Texts are understood to encode a particular "ideal" or "implied" reader, and empirical readers are understood to decode texts in accordance with particular knowledge and interests as shaped by the social context (Eco <u>1979</u>). Notably, for reception studies this approach represents more than a theoretical assumption, for the ways in which meanings emerge from the text-reader interaction also raises empirical questions for research (unlike, for instance, in the tradition of literary aesthetics), as advanced, for instance, in Livingstone <u>1998</u>, a book on the reception of television soap opera. Also, by contrast with linear approaches, reception studies eschew a cognitive focus on what individuals understand of or recall from a message. Instead, it emphasizes that interpretation should be understood as a collective process, situated in an interpretative community or communities, and divergent among audiences from different communities. In his account of the circuit of culture, Johnson <u>1986</u> made a key statement for British cultural studies regarding the dynamic interrelations between production and consumption in the production and reproduction of meanings. Situating reception within broader sociocultural contexts thus allows audience researchers to embrace broader questions of identity, participation, politics, and power through the exploration of how people make sense of media texts in their daily lives. Much of this work was influenced by a feminist rethinking of the implicit "feminization" of early conceptions of the audience (Modleski <u>1982</u>). Silverstone <u>1994</u> represents some of these core arguments, focusing on the role of television and its reception in everyday life, and Ginsburg, et al. 2002, a collection of ethnographic studies from around the world, is an excellent empirical inroad into reception studies in recent times. Note that efforts to contextualize the process of reception has permitted audience researchers to recognize how people engage with media as goods or objects as well as engaging with media as texts or genres; consequently, in recent years the traditions of audience reception and media ethnography have become closely entwined.

Eco, U. 1979. *The role of the reader: Explorations in the semiotics of texts.* Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press. [ISBN: 9780253111395]
The classic semiotic account of how texts embed the knowledge and interpretative processes of the reader within their very structure. Rejecting the notion of the intentional producer, Umberto Eco examines how different textual genres, whether "open" or "closed," anticipate the knowledge of "model" readers, opening the way for an empirical examination of actual readers.

Fiske, J. 1987. *Television culture*. London: Methuen. [ISBN: 9780416924305]
John Fiske highlights the concept of textual polysemy and contributes to the use of the plural form of "audiences" to mark the shift from treating audiences as a homogenous mass to recognizing their heterogeneity. He shows how theories of reception, genre, openness, and connotation/denotation can reveal the interpretative processes of media audiences as they watch television.

Fiske, J. 1992. Audiencing: A cultural studies approach to watching television. *Poetics* 21:345–359. <u>http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0304422X9290013S</u>

This essay builds a bridge between social scientific, and cultural studies approaches to audience research, while fully aware of their differences. Using the public controversy over the sitcom *Married . . . with children* as his case study, Fiske suggests that audiencing (the interpretative work of viewing or discussing television) is an integral part of culture, necessary to the circulation of cultural forms and meanings.

Ginsburg, F. D., L. Abu-Lughod, and B. Larkin, eds. 2002. *Media worlds: Anthropology on new terrain*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press. [ISBN: 9780520224483]
An excellent collection of essays in which media anthropologists position audience reception within the contexts of everyday life in cultures in contexts as diverse as Tibet, India, Egypt, Zambia, Thailand, Bali, China, and Belize. These essays encompass transnational media flows, political economies, and sites of production and technology and their uses, challenging the dominance of largely Western accounts of media use and reception with ethnographic accounts from around the world.

Johnson, R. 1986. What is cultural studies anyway? *Social Text* 16:38–80.
http://www.jstor.org/stable/466285
A classic statement for British cultural studies of the dynamic circuit of culture that connects the production and reproduction of meanings. Working within a Frankfurt-school-inspired framework, Richard Johnson critically examines the ways in which culture escapes political-economic determination, opening the way for an analysis of ordinary consumption (including audience reception of media texts) as part of the everyday operation of power and resistance.

Livingstone, S. 1998. *Making sense of television: The psychology of audience interpretation*. 2d ed. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415186230]
Sonia Livingstone contrasts interpretation and reception studies to the dominant tradition of audience research and its behavioral focus on the linear sender-message-receiver (or, producer-message-audience)—in which media texts are regarded as stimuli to which media audiences merely respond. Using the soap opera as a case study, she shows how empirical audiences interpret television and so contribute to the circuit of culture in everyday life.

Modleski, T. 1982. *Loving with a vengeance: Mass-produced fantasies for women*. New York: Methuen.[ISBN: 0416009913]
Although a purely textual analysis, this feminist classic argues for a patriarchal role for female readers of popular romance novels in direct counter to the ethnography of Radway 1984 (cited under *Classic Studies of Audience Reception*), resulting in a prominent debate over the gender politics of "reading the romance." By paying critical attention to "mass produced fantasies for women," Modleski rejects the elitism within much feminist criticism at the time. Thus she refuses to ignore or condemn women's popular fiction, instead recognizing its importance within popular culture, and arguing that the narrative pleasure found by women reading these genres deserves academic attention.

Silverstone, R. 1994. *Television and everyday life*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415016469]
A thoughtful synthesis of emerging ideas in audience research in the heyday of research on the mass audience for television. Roger Silverstone centers on audience reception and audience ethnography as partial solutions to some key theoretical problems—with identifying the meaning of a text, with the concept of ideology, and with the difficulty of theorizing the ordinary experience of engaging with media.

Theoretical Approaches to Interpretation

Theories of interpretation have their roots in formalism, structuralism, phenomenology, and philosophical hermeneutics—some key sources that are annotated below. Interpretation has been theorized in the philosophy of the human sciences from centuries ago in a branch of theory broadly referred to as "hermeneutics." Early hermeneutics often focused on objectivity in the interpretation of texts, asking how the reader somehow grasps what the author intended. In later years, Martin Heidegger (b. 1889–d. 1976) and his student Hans-Georg Gadamer (b. 1900–d. 2002) shifted the focus to the inherent subjectivity of the task of interpretation. Interpretation, they argued, could not be separated from a person's understanding, traditions, and prejudices, so these factors would always play a role in the meanings made (Gadamer 1975). The hermeneutic focus within literary theory, by contrast, starts from "dissatisfaction with formalist principles and the recognition that the practice of supposedly impersonal and disinterested reading is never innocent" (Freund 1987, p. 10). Moreover, the model (or ideal, or mock) reader is conceived not as a real reader, nor in terms of the intentionality of the author, but rather as a property of the text (Tompkins 1980). Broadly, one can distinguish the North American reader-response school from the European reception aesthetics school. Both approaches decenter the text, deliberately countering the highly text-centered approach of New Criticism from the 1930s to 1950s (in which this approach marginalized or even rejected consideration of the reader and emphasized the critics' privileged status in interpreting the text. Scholars contributed variously from French structuralism, American rhetorical theory, German literary theory (Iser 1978), and stylistic criticism (Fish 1980). Stanley Fish claimed a sentence to be an event, something that happens with the participation of the reader, and he conceived of the reader as part of a collectivity. So, by referring to "interpretive communities," Fish did not mean to indicate a group of people but rather a collection of norms and strategies held in common. As Freund observes, what is key here is the claim that people's strategies and habits of interpretation are not individual and unique but social and shared. Differently from American reader-response criticism, German reception aesthetics grew within a group of scholars at Konztanz, all of whom shared a common set of ideas. Important for them was to shift the analytic focus from the reader's response to the text (in the American tradition) to a focus on the judgment of the reader (i.e., the process of reception itself). As Wolfgang Iser points out, *Rezeptionaesthetik* indicates an emphasis on reception, while *Wirkungsaesthetik* emphasizes the potential effect of the text. Other differences also exist—Holub 1984 notes the diversity of purposes and origins among American reader-response theorists, observing "these theorists are not participating in any critical movement, and they are apparently responding with their methods to quite different predecessors and circumstances" (p. xiii). The Konztanz School, by contrast, is just that—a school of like-minded scholars embarked on a common project. Notwithstanding their differences, theories of interpretation in general have been critiqued for being too theoretical and unwilling to explore empirical processes of reading, for being detached from the task of critique, and for largely assuming a middle-class, educated individual to be "the reader" in theorizing the process of text-reader interaction. For an account of some of these critiques and, notwithstanding, for an overview of the achievements of theories of interpretation, see Fluck 2000.

Fish, S. 1980. *Is there a text in this class? The authority of interpretive communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press. [ISBN: 9780674467255]
Stanley Fish strikes a balance between formalist claims of the single, authoritative, unchangeable textual meaning on the one hand and the claim of endless, individual, subjective readings on the other, by proposing the concept of interpretive communities. He

suggests that every reader approach a text as a part of a community of others, with whom he or she shares interpretive resources.

Fluck, W. 2000. The search for distance: Negation and negativity in Wolfgang Iser's literary theory. *New Literary History* 31.1: 175–210.
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/new_literary_history/v031/31.1fluck.pdf
Winfried Fluck grasps some important critiques in his essay, including Holub <u>1984</u>, a critique of Iser's reader as a-contextualized or, worse, as always a "competent and cultured reader" (Holub 1984, p. 97), and Tompkins <u>1980</u>, a critique that this discussion of texts and readers has not really moved away from the formalism of New Criticism, still persisting in essentializing the text and reader, but without empirical investigation in practice.

Freund, E. 1987. *The Return of the reader: Reader-response criticism*. London: Routledge.
In this key introductory text, Elizabeth Freund begins her account of reader-response theory by noting how marginalized was the role of the reader in previous critical writing. She traces the beginnings of reader response in the structuralist approaches of Culler and Fish's focus on the emotional and affective responses of communities of interpretation, followed by Holland's work on transactive criticism and Iser's Continental reception aesthetics. [ISBN: 978-0416344103]

Gadamer, H. 1975. *Truth and method*. London: Sheed and Ward.
In this classic text in philosophical hermeneutics, Hans Gadamer establishes that the main task of interpretation is not to grasp a certain meaning of a text as intended by the speaker/author but rather to show that interpretive work is universal, always preconditioned by past experiences, and never "objective." In conjunction with Heidegger, he shifted the focus from interpretations of the text to interpretation and understanding of life.

Holub, R. C. 1984. *Reception theory: A critical introduction*. London: Methuen. [ISBN: 9780416335804]
In a core introductory text to reception theory, Robert Holub identifies the various roots of interpretive theories from Russian Formalism, phenomenology, structuralism, and philosophical hermeneutics. He concludes with an outline of empirical reception studies as an actual and future project.

Iser, W. 1978. *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press. [ISBN: 9780801821011]
A key text in Continental reception aesthetics, this book differentiates the "work" and the "text." The text, Iser argues, represents a moment of encoding specific norms, while the work, by contrast, differs from the text, for it brings to the moment of encoding the possibilities opened up by the interpretative act of decoding. For Wolfgang Iser, it is only the "convergence of text and reader" that brings the work (rather than the text) into existence.

Jauss, H. R. 1982. *Towards an aesthetic of reception*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press. [ISBN: 9780816610372]
Hans Robert Jauss approaches reception theory from a historical point of view, suggesting that the aesthetic value of a text is passed on through time, and that the aesthetic dimension comes from the first reading of the text that involves a comparison of this text to others. He introduces the concept of *Erwartungshorizont* (horizon of expectations), which is

contributed to by the norms of the genre, contemporary familiar literary-historical surroundings.

Suleiman, S., and I. Crosman, eds. 1980. *The reader in the text*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press. [ISBN: 9780691064369]
This key text introduces the main schools of thought within literary approaches to interpretation. Suleiman and Crossman identify six broad streams in literary reception theory: rhetorical, semiotic and structuralist, phenomenological, subjective and psychological, historical and sociological, and hermeneutic. An important introduction to theories of interpretation from a literary/humanities perspective.

Tompkins, J. P., ed. 1980. *Reader-response criticism: From formalism to post-structuralism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press. [ISBN: 9780801824005]
In this influential text, Jane Tompkins brings together essays that trace the origins of reader-response criticism from its beginnings in a highly formalist, text-centered position toward today's reader-oriented positions, as advocated by the Continental school.

Classic Studies of Audience Reception

Although the concept of interpretation lies at the heart of reception studies, other intellectual traditions have also informed this lively fusion of arguments and approaches to the audience within media, communication, and cultural studies— these include feminist, Marxist, postcolonial, psychoanalytical, and anthropological perspectives. Within this diversity, some core claims prevail. These were, significantly, strongly evident in the early, classic texts that combined theory and evidence to lead the way into the new endeavor of reception analysis, albeit that these claims have become somewhat diluted, too easily taken for granted, even forgotten, in subsequent work. The core claims may be summarized as follows. First, audience reception cannot be predicted from analysis of the text alone, for texts are polysemic, and have no singular meaning. In Eco's terms (see Eco 1979, cited under *Core Texts*), the virtual text must be actualized by a real reader in a particular context, resulting in diverse readings or interpretations that are each a variant on the implied reader embedded into the virtual text. Consequently, the significance of media messages for their audiences cannot be known from an analysis of the message alone (Ang 1985, Radway 1984). This claim is intended as a deliberate critique of those semiotic, literary, or film theory scholars that find it sufficient to analyze the text and thereby "know" its meaning. Second, media audiences can be playful, critical, creative, or resistant in their readings, as illustrated by three classic studies (Hodge and Tripp 1986; Liebes and Katz 1990; Morley 1980). This interpretative divergence is itself socially determined by the variable contexts of audiences' lives, and thus demands a program of research that locates interpretative processes in real-world social contexts of media use. This claim challenges the tendency of both academic and public commentators to treat the audience as singular, homogenous, and thereby predictable. It is not intended to claim merely that the audience is idiosyncratic but rather to recognize that sociological determinants combine with semiotic influences in shaping the meaning that emerges from audience engagement with texts. In this respect, reception studies differ from the uses and gratifications tradition with which they are sometimes aligned, for while the latter examine audience motivations, they make no link to texts and thus miss the significance of interpretation. Third, these micro-processes of interpretation play a key role in the wider circuit of culture (Johnson 1986, cited under *Core Texts*) by which the political economic forces that frame the exercise of media power may have their effect or, to a greater or lesser degree, be destabilized or reconfigured by the sense-making processes of contingent

audiences (Ginsburg, et al. 2002, cited under *Core Texts*). This claim is framed as a counter to media effects research that tends to see media influence as unidirectional (from the media to the audience) without recognizing that audiences' interpretations play a role in shaping—whether through direct consumer feedback, indirect social consequences, or the sedimenting of cultural practices— the processes of media production and distribution. For the most part, the "media" of audience reception studies has been television, but some have applied the approach also to film (Stacey 1994) or even novel reading (Radway 1984).

Ang, I. 1985. *Watching* Dallas: *Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*. New York: Methuen. [ISBN: 9780416416305]
Ien Ang's influential book examines the responses (via letters in response to the researcher's advertisement) of forty-two viewers of the prime-time US soap opera, *Dallas*. Her analysis pursues the question of how audience agency relates to power, adopting an explicitly feminist analysis that questions women's professed identification with the strong yet doomed female characters. She employs Raymond Williams's concept of the "structure of feeling" to reveal that it is the "tragic structure feeling," rather than the likeness to their own humdrum lives, that provides the emotional realism that viewers discuss finding in the program.

Hodge, B., and D. Tripp. 1986. *Children and television: A semiotic approach*. Cambridge: Polity. [ISBN: 9780804713528]
Bob Hodge and David Tripp integrate socio-cognitive developmental psychology with social semiotics and educational theory to show how children, like adults, form interpretative audiences worthy of careful investigation. As a result, the authors contest the moral panics that presume children receive a given, fixed—and often violent—television program in the same way as the anxious adults who seek to protect them.

Liebes, T., and E. Katz. 1990. *The export of meaning: Cross-cultural readings of* Dallas. New York: Oxford Univ. Press. [ISBN: 9780195054873]
A classic text in empirical reception studies, this study reports from the Israeli reception of the American soap opera, *Dallas*. As signaled by the title, *The export of meaning,* the authors examine the reception of this very American text in other countries and cultures, framed by theories of globalization and media imperialism. Drawing on structuralist linguistics, Liebes and Katz reveal people's interpretations of the text to be variously critical, ludic (playful), and referential, thus refuting the homogenizing logic of cultural imperialism by revealing context-dependent processes of cultural interpretation.

Livingstone, S., and P. Lunt. 1994. *Talk on television: Audience participation and public debate*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780203131916]
Responding to the challenge that talk shows represent an interpretative audience on television as well as in front of it, this book takes the case of talk show audiences and participants to reveal that audience reception is not simply an activity in the private domain. Rather, it weaves a web of interconnections across the public/private divide, as people become engaged with public matters discussed at home, with private matters aired in public, and with representations of the public that they may accept or critique as legitimate voices in the public sphere.

Morley, D. 1980. *The* Nationwide *audience: Structure and decoding*. London: British Film Institute. [ISBN: 9780851700977]

David Morley's hugely influential project *Nationwide* demonstrates the interconnections between the production and reproduction of dominant meanings, revealing some potential for resistant or alternative readings, depending on the sociocultural backgrounds and resources of audiences. Focusing on social class differentiation as the key point of inquiry, this project provided the empirical counterpart to Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding approach to audience interpretation (Hall 1980 and Hall 1994, cited under *Encoding/decoding*), revealing the existence of dominant, oppositional, and negotiated readings.

Press, A. L. 1991. *Women watching television*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press. [ISBN: 9780812212860]
Press asks how women interpret television's portrayal of gender roles as well as those of social class in contemporary American society, and whether women's self-conceptions are shaped by these portrayals. This book is especially important because of its focus on age and generation in relation to gender and class, and still remains one of the few explorations to draw out generational differences in women's television reception.

Radway, J. 1984. *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy and popular literature*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press. [ISBN: 9780807815908]
Janice Radway's *Reading the romance,* an investigation of the meaning and role of the romance in the lives of forty-two women in an American town, found both that her readers knew how and why they read romances, but also that they operated under cultural assumptions and corollaries that constitute their social contexts. The "mild protest" that Radway sees in this act of reading is something that, she feared, would be judged insufficient in terms of the protest for social change demanded by feminists, rightly, as it turned out.

Schröder, K. C. 1988. The pleasure of *Dynasty:* The weekly reconstruction of self-confidence. In *Television and its audience: International research perspectives*. Edited by P. Drummond and R. Paterson. London: British Film Institute. [ISBN: 978-0851702247]
This study reports from a cross-cultural account of the reception of the US prime-time soap opera *Dynasty*, comparing the interpretations of American and Danish viewers. The essay presents *Dynasty* as an "interminable hermeneutic puzzle," reasoning that in both cultures, television has functioned as a "forum" for collective culture.

Stacey, J. 1994. *Star gazing: Hollywood cinema and female spectatorship*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415091787]
Jackie Stacey offers an original analysis of women's responses to Hollywood stars in the cinema. It's a pioneering and fascinating account, based on extensive empirical work with film audiences, of how women interpret the representation of stars and stardom on the cinema screen. Theoretically, Stacey challenges the inviolate character of the text (and the authority of the textual analysis) though her influential account of empirical audiences.

Journals

Theory and research on interpretation in general, and reception in particular, can be found in many journals across the social sciences and especially the humanities. Noted in this section are the key journals that publish work developing the interpretative approach to processes of media reception among empirical audiences. All these journals are fully peer-reviewed and available online (in addition to print) with a subscription, and **Participations** is an open-access online-only journal.

*The *Communication Review*[http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gcrv20#.UdR2IaxAavg]*.
Focusing on three key strands—communication and culture, communication as a social force, and communication and mind—this journal publishes critical, qualitative research to do with media audiences, texts, production, and contexts of consumption.

Critical Studies in Mass Communication[http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcsm20#.UdR5GKxAavg]*.
Spanning history, political economy, critical philosophy, race and feminist theorizing, rhetorical and media criticism, and literary theory, this journal includes critical, qualitative work on a diverse range of media and genres.

Cultural Studies[http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcus20#.UdR5QqxAavg]*.
This journal publishes articles that focus on the relation between cultural practices, everyday life, and material, economic, political, and geographical and historical contexts, and hence is an important outlet for audience reception research.

European Journal of Communication[http://ejc.sagepub.com/]*.
Addressing itself to an international audience, this journal publishes research of particular relevance to the European academic community. It publishes media and communications research in particular and remains a key journal for reception studies.

European Journal of Cultural Studies[http://ecs.sagepub.com/]*.
This journal is an interdisciplinary platform for topics including gendered identities, cultural citizenship, migration, postcolonial criticism, consumer cultures, media and film, and cultural policy.

International Journal of Cultural Studies[http://ics.sagepub.com/]*.
This journal publishes theoretical, empirical, and historical research from across the globe as it explores globalization and the impact of globalization on local cultural practices and media ecologies.

Media, Culture & Society[http://mcs.sagepub.com/]*.
A journal focused on publishing research about media texts, production, and audiences, including the use of newer information and communication technologies, within their political, economic, cultural, and historical contexts.

Participations: The International Journal of Audience and Reception Studies[http://www.participations.org/index.htm]*.
Participations is an online journal devoted to the strengthening and development of the fields of audience and reception studies and publishes research with readers, listeners, viewers, whole body participants, and receptive and interactive modes of engagement.

Popular Communication[http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hppc20#.UdR5j6xAavg]*.
This journal publishes research on popular communication texts, artifacts, audiences, events, and practices, including the Internet, youth culture, representation, fandom, film, sports, spectacles, the digital revolution, sexuality, advertising/consumer culture, television, radio, music, magazines, and dance.

Approaches to Audience Reception

The conceptual and empirical appearance of audiences and their interpretative work in the study of mediated communication was a significant moment for media and communication theory. Politically, it was significant, first, because it helped balance a conversation on the impact of the media on an unthinking audience by irreversibly establishing an interpretative, critical, and sometimes resistant viewer who decodes media content by using a variety of symbolic resources, and second, because cultural and ethnographic explorations of reception informed questions of identity, communality, resistance, and essentially politics, thereby offering an inquiry into real audiences instead of reading off dominant messages in media discourses. As the narrative of empirical reception studies developed with the gradual convergence, if not complete integration, of a variety of fields (Livingstone 1998; see also Jensen and Rosengren 1990), the decoder of media messages—initially theorized as an implied reader (Allen 1995)—gained a real-life context outside of laboratory settings, the reader of romance novels was situated in communities of interpretation (Radway 1984, cited under *Classic Studies of Audience Reception*), and the laudable pursuit of meaning in representation was explored empirically at the interface of representation and interpretation (Ang 1996). Since then, scholars have reflected on the course the field has taken over the last few decades, indicating the presence of a range of different theoretical and methodological approaches, and in the introduction to this section, some of these overview texts (Barker 2006, Kitzinger 2004) are identified. Huimin Jin's interview with David Morley (Jin 2011) sees an audience researcher reflect on the contribution of British cultural studies to audience research, the essay Barker 2006 identifies some key tasks for audience researchers in the years ahead, and the essay Kitzinger 2004 is an excellent overview of the impetus for audience research, a range of approaches and disagreements, and audience research methods. The essay Livingstone 1998 likewise reviews streams that have converged to form what is called audience reception studies, outlining also how some approaches have been prioritized over others. The author also identifies, as Barker does, some future prospects for the field.

Allen, R. C. 1995. *To be continued. . . : Soap operas around the world*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415110068]
Although Robert Allen doesn't directly engage with empirical audiences, he insightfully scopes their interpretative role (as the "implied" or "model" reader, following Eco 1979, cited under *Core Texts*). The introduction to the volume especially captures the significance of the soap opera genre for reception and globalization studies, pinpointing the gender and cultural politics inscribed into popular culture texts.

Ang, I. 1996. *Living room wars: Rethinking media audiences for a postmodern world*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415128001]
In this collection of essays on audience research, Ang reflects on how the postmodern, "as a historical trend and as a mode of knowing,, has influenced the trajectory of audience research. The essays in the book encompass the politics of empirical audience research, the challenges of "radical contextualism" in ethnographic audience research, and developments in globalization and the global-local circulation of texts and meanings.

Barker, M. 2006. I have seen the future and it is not here yet. . . ; Or, on being ambitious for audience research. *The Communication Review* 9:123–141.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10714420600663310
In this essay, Martin Barker reviews some of the often forgotten achievements of the uses and gratifications tradition, and critiques the dominance of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model for conceptualizing media-audience relations (Hall 1980, Hall 1994, cited under

Encoding/decoding). He calls for a greater amount of empirical research, more measurable findings for audience research, and greater efforts to triangulate qualitative and quantitative methods.

Hartley, J. 2006. 'Read thy self': Text, audience, and method in cultural studies. In *Questions of method in cultural studies*. Edited by M. White and J. Schwoch, 71–104. Oxford: Blackwell. [ISBN-13: 978-0631229780]
A reflective piece on why early audience reception researchers were so heavily criticized for their theoretical intervention. John Hartley unpacks the commonplace misunderstanding that reception studies indulged in excessive celebration of "audience activity" and, in the process, lost sight of the operation of power.

Jensen, K. J., and K. E. Rosengren. 1990. Five traditions in search of the audience. *European Journal of Communication* 5.2–3: 207–238. http://ejc.sagepub.com/content/5/2/207
Jensen and Rosengren's account identifies the following traditions of audience research in general: effects research, uses and gratifications research, literary criticism, cultural studies, and reception analysis. Thus reception studies are located among the competing/alternative traditions. Jensen and Rosengren, like Livingstone, indicate the advantages of converging some of these approaches, especially transcending the qualitative/quantitative divide, with the aim of theoretical and methodological development.

Jin, H. 2011. British cultural studies, active audiences and the status of cultural theory: An interview with David Morley. *Theory, Culture and Society* 28.4: 124–144. http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/28/4/124
In this interview, David Morley reviews his work with media audiences in the context of the British cultural studies tradition, postmodernism, Marxism, and social movements. Morley presents the ongoing complexities surrounding the "active audience."

Kitzinger, J. 2004. Audience and readership research. In *The Sage handbook of media studies*. Edited by J. Downing. London: Sage. [ISBN: 9780761921691]
Jenny Kitzinger identifies some important impetuses behind audience research, these being concerns about morality and sex, response to technological developments, questions about culture, politics and identity and market imperatives. The essay reviews the many disagreements and debates that have arisen during the history of audience research and concludes by commenting on a range of different methods used to study audiences.

Livingstone, S. 1998. Relationships between media and audiences: Prospects for future research. In *Media, culture, identity*. Edited by T. Liebes and J. Curran, 237–255. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415159920]
Livingstone identifies six distinct lines of argumentation, each drawing on a different disciplinary perspective, converged on the analysis of audience interpretation in the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in a lively body of research. Her account includes the cultural studies' "encoding/decoding" model, uses, and gratifications research on the "active audience," critical mass communications' shift away from ideological and institutional determinants of meaning, the Continental reception aesthetics approach, feminist approaches to alternative and resistant readings, and the "ethnographic turn" within audience.

Schröder, K. C. 1994. Audience semiotics, interpretive communities, and the "ethnographic" turn in media research. *Media, Culture & Society* 16:337–347. Not online.

Beginning with a critique of the over-focus on ideology resulting from the field's over-dependence on Hall's encoding/decoding model, Schröder suggests a general model of media reception with six dimensions: motivation, comprehension, discrimination, position, evaluation, and implementation. He suggests this model might help us explore the complexity of actual readings without losing sight of "politically committed audience research concerned with the role of the media in processes of social reproduction and, not least, social change."

Encoding/decoding

Working within the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Stuart Hall developed the encoding/decoding model, which hugely influenced many subsequent empirical projects in the field of media reception and drew its impetus from a range of different sources. One of these was Hall's disagreement with the behaviorist approach of the Leicester school, led by James Halloran, which, Hall claimed, oversimplified the process of meaning making into something that happens at the end of a decontextualized linear process. Hall's own position was grounded in his reengagement with Marxist theory, especially following the work of Antonio Gramsci (b. 1891–d. 1937) on ideology and hegemony. Hall's work was itself born out of the Marxist sociology of literature led by, among others, the British literary scholars Raymond Williams (b. 1921–d. 1988) and Richard Hoggart (b. 1918–). Extending the arguments of the Frankfurt school regarding the partial independence of culture from economy, the encoding/decoding approach within audience studies (and cultural studies more generally) avoided the reductive Marxist portrayal of the media as a hegemonic and capitalist ideological instrument, partly by incorporating arguments from semiotic and reception theory. Yet Hall retained a strong focus on social reproduction in its account of the production and decoding of meanings circulating among different social classes. Hall's own writings on his model (Hall 1980, Hall 1994), as well as key texts such as Kim 2004, Morley 1992, Pillai 1992, Williams 1977, and Wren-Lewis 1983, have made use of the encoding/decoding approach, while Livingstone 1992 illustrates how the approach can be integrated with those from literary aesthetics.

Hall, S. 1980. Encoding/decoding. In *Culture, media, language*. Edited by S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, and P. Willis, 128–138. London: Hutchinson. [ISBN: 9780091420703]
In this classic essay on the encoding and decoding of meaning in popular culture, Stuart Hall emphasizes the role of audience members' social positioning leading to the differential interpretation of texts by different groups. He suggests three positions of meaning making —the dominant (or hegemonic) reading, in which interpreters share the text's encoded meaning and produce the preferred reading; the negotiated reading, in which the readers reach a middle ground between the preferred reading and the reading produces by their own contextual conditions; and the oppositional reading, in which readers completely go against the encoded message.

Hall, S. 1994. Reflections on the encoding/decoding model. In *Viewing, reading, listening: Audiences and cultural reception*. Edited by J. Cruz and J. Lewis. Boulder: Westview Press. [ISBN: 9780813315379]
In conversation with audience researchers, Hall reviews the encoding/decoding model in this interview, clarifying that he did not intend to suggest a notion of limitless polysemy. Hall explains in the interview that his intervention was framed against the "traditional empirical, positivistic models" of the Centre for Mass Communications Research at Leicester.

Kim, S. 2004. Rereading David Morley's the *"Nationwide"* audience. *Cultural Studies* 18.1: 84–108. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0950238042000181629
This paper uses statistical analyses to reanalyze Morley's findings from the *Nationwide* project to demonstrate that decodings of the program are clearly patterned by their social positions such as class, gender, race, and age. It reinforces Morley's emphasis on social class in the production of meaning.

Livingstone, S. 1992. *The resourceful reader: Interpreting television characters and narratives[http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/1002/]*. *Communication Yearbook* 1:15: 58–90. [ISBN: 9780415876940]
This essay reflects on a qualitative and quantitative study of viewers' reception of soap opera narratives. It brings together theoretical insights from literary aesthetics, social psychology, and cultural studies. The method used was narrative recall, which invited viewers to retell narratives from the soap opera they viewed. This study involved a convergence of hermeneutic concepts in its overall framing and social psychological approaches in design and analysis. The results showed how audiences negotiate the meaning of a particular text and were used to suggest convergences between (the then diverging) traditions of audience research.

Morley, D. 1992. *Television, audiences and cultural studies*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415054447]
In this later book, Morley republishes the main sections of *The Nationwide audience*, his 1981 "critical postscript," and subsequent reflections on the ambition and achievements of the project. He focuses on the relationships between interpretive work, on the one hand, and class, ideology, and gender on the other. He examines the role of the media and technologies in private as well as public spaces and the ways in which global and local identities are performed in a range of different spaces of viewing and consumption.

Pillai, P. 1992. Rereading Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model. *Communication Theory* 2.3: 221–233.
This is an excellent review of Hall's encoding/decoding model in the context of his later work. Poonam Pillai, responds to some of the critiques of Hall's model, using Hall'shis theory of articulation (developed after the encoding/decoding model) as an advance over the earlier model and a response to some of the criticisms against it.

Williams, R. 1977. *Marxism and literature*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press. [ISBN: 9780198760566]
A classic text that articulates the potential for integration between sociological and literary analysis in understanding the power relations that structure meaning in society. Born from the then-radical tradition of the sociology of literature, itself framed by a Marxist perspective, this is one of several key texts by Williams that set the scene for the establishment of British Cultural Studies in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the United Kingdom.

Wren-Lewis, J. 1983. The encoding/decoding model: Criticisms and developments for research on decoding. *Media, Culture & Society* 5.2:179–197.
http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/5/2/179
Written at a time when empirical investigations of "decoding" were still rare, Wren-Lewis critiques Morley's *Nationwide* project in this essay and argues that the analyst should

construct a series of preferred readings *after* interviewing has taken place instead of constructing a preferred reading from textual analysis alone.

Reception and Resistance

As explored in the *Encoding/decoding* approach to reception studies, some audience readings of media texts do not accept but precisely contest or otherwise resist the dominant reading. In the power struggles played out in society among different interest groups, some are played out in the domain of symbolic power. Thus the empirical findings that ideologically normative readings inscribed in texts are resisted by audiences—on the grounds of different class, gender, ethnic, or other cultural interests—matters. In the wider circuit of culture, such symbolic moments of reinterpretation or resistance can—especially when the audience collectivity is sizable or particularly vocal—have real consequences for established power. For the most part, however, empirical research reveals only modest pockets of resistant readings among audiences, thus belying the radical hopes among some researchers regarding the potential of the symbolic struggles of the audience (Ang 1989, Seamann 1992). More often, and more equivocally, reception studies reveal the widespread willingness of audiences to question, negotiate, or play with alternative readings in a reflexive manner (Banaji 2008, cited under *Cultural Diversity ; Brown 1994, cited under *Linking Identity and Genre*), without the outcome being a wholesale rejection of established norms.

Ang, I. 1989. Wanted: Audiences; On the politics of empirical audience studies. In *Remote control: Television audiences and cultural power*. Edited by E. Seiter, H. Borchers, G. Kreutzner, and E.-M. Warth. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415036054]
Using the *Nationwide* project as an example, Ien Ang explores the politics of "critical," qualitative audience research, particularly ethnography. This essay is especially interesting for those who want to trace the divergences and convergences between different paradigms in media and communications research, because Ang, as a critical researcher, objects quite strongly to any possibility of a convergence between mainstream mass communications research and cultural studies approaches.

Barker, M., J. Arthurs, and R. Harindranath. 2001. *The crash controversy: Censorship campaigns and film reception*. London: Wallflower Press. [ISBN: 9781903364178]
Following a yearlong investigation of the controversy surrounding the film *Crashed*, and attempts to get it banned, Martin Barker and colleagues explore how popular media used the notion of a passive audience, contributing to worries about the "dangers" of a film. Equally importantly, they argue that the audience researcher must increasingly engage with the public; otherwise, their findings about real audiences will not reach broader society.

Barker, M., and K. Brooks. 1998. *Knowing audiences: Judge Dredd; Its friends, fans and foes*. Luton, UK: University of Luton Press. [ISBN: 9781860205491]
A detailed exposition of how and why audiences interpret a film as they do, including the interpretations of ordinary views, committed fans of the film, and even the interpretations of those who have not seen it (but merely been exposed to the extra-textual discussions of the film in popular discourse). The book is strong also in its inclusion—all too rare in reception studies—of a critical analysis not only of the text but also of its context of production and distribution.

Bobo, J. 1989. Sifting through the controversy: Reading *The color purple. Callaloo* (Spring): 332–342. www.jstor.org/stable/2931568

In this essay, Jacqueline Bobo presents findings from her work with black women readers of Alice Walker's novel *The color purple*. Bobo notes that through a complex process of negotiation, black women audiences reconstructed the film so as to connect with a larger movement of black women as cultural workers. Importantly, Bobo's findings reveal that "the disputes over *The color purple* actually stimulated meaning production that connected with a larger movement of black women that is empowering black women and forming a potent force for change" (p. 341).

Eldridge, J., ed. 1993. *Getting the message: News, truth and power*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415079839]
Eldridge here showcases some of the most innovative of the audience reception studies conducted by the Glasgow University Media Group. Through a close examination of the particular means by which politically diverse audiences make sense of mainstream news texts, Eldridge, Philo, Kitzinger, and colleagues establish how, despite the vagaries of negotiated meanings, dominant (or preferred) readings are often the outcome of an active engagement with the screen. This outcome establishes a subtle link between reception studies and media effects research.

Lewis, J. 1991. *The ideological octopus: An exploration of television and its audience*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 978-0415902885]
Partly an empirical case, partly a careful elucidation of the methodological decisions and dilemmas endemic to reception studies, Lewis presents two case studies of audiences interpreting television—one is the news; the other is the famous US sitcom *The Cosby Show*. Arguing, as implied in the title, that the task of navigating the implicit ideological messages is a complex one, Lewis's volume is especially interesting for its examination of why a sitcom about a black family became so popular in an arguably racist society such as America.

Liebes, T. 1992. Decoding television news: The political discourse of Israeli hawks and doves. *Theory and Society* 21.3: 357–381. www.jstor.org/stable/657581
Capitalizing on the efforts of parents to socialize their children as young citizens, this empirical investigation focuses on the discussions about value within the family, showing how different audience readings of the same program may be contested. Since conservative ("hawkish") views among audiences chime with television news ideology and are easily expressed in simple accounts of world affairs, these parents find it easier to convey their politics (via their interpretation of the news) than do left/liberal ("dovish") parents, in the context of the Israel/Palestine conflict.

Livingstone, S. 1990. Interpreting television narrative: How viewers see a story. *Journal of Communication* 40.1: 72–82. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1990.tb02252.x/pdf
Integrating the reception-aesthetic concept of the open text with the encoding/decoding approach to audience response (categorized as dominant, negotiated, or oppositional), Sonia Livingstone analyzes viewers' reception of an extended soap opera narrative. As she shows, in the "open" soap opera genre, two ideologically dominant yet contrasting readings are offered to viewers, complicating the categorization of their divergent responses as either dominant or oppositional.

Seamann, W. R. 1992. Active audience theory: Pointless populism. *Media, Culture and Society* 14.2: 301–311. http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/14/2/301

An influential argument capturing the various critical doubts regarding the celebratory tone taken in some reception studies. Seamann argues that although audiences can and do diverge in their interpretations of television programs, such divergence is merely idiosyncratic and thus pointless, for unless it translates into collective acts of resistance, which he proposes it does not, it poses no real challenge to established power.

Interpretative Communities and the Social Infrastructure of Reception

Taking a lead from the literary theory argument (Fish 1980, cited under *Theoretical Approaches to Interpretation*) that interpretation is a social/discursive and not an individual achievement, some audience researchers— especially those influenced by the burgeoning field of media anthropology (Bird 2003, Radway 1985)—have studied not merely individual processes of reception but also the interpretative communities within which such processes arise and take shape. The most notable study bringing these ideas to the attention of audience researchers is Radway 1984 (cited under *Classic Studies of Audience Reception*). In this section, both foundational (Gamson 1992) and more recent instances (Hermes and Stello 2000) of the power of interpretative communities to contextualize and support audience reception and public engagement are identified.

Bird, S. E. 2003. *The audience in everyday life: Living in a media world*. New York: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415942591]
Drawing on perspectives from folklore and anthropology, Bird conducts ethnographic analyses of the online and offline contexts of reception, ranging from audiences' responses to tabloids, scandals, and hoaxes, to media representations, online support groups, and forums. An excellent account for and by media anthropologists.

Gamson, W. 1992. *Talking politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press. [ISBN: 9780521430623]
By tracing the socio-discursive negotiations over the meaning of television news among small groups of working-class audiences of different political persuasions, Gamson reveals the collective process of interpretation that goes into the formation of public opinion. Challenging individualistic accounts of interpretation, he offers a telling and insightful account of the dilemmatic nature of public opinion, as formed within interpretative communities.

Hermes, J., and C. Stello. 2000. Cultural citizenship and crime fiction: Politics and the interpretive community. *Cultural Studies* 3.2: 215–232.
http://ecs.sagepub.com/content/3/2/215
Fish's notion of the interpretive community is used here to make a connection between citizenship and popular culture, using the reception of detective fiction as a case study to demonstrate how audiences engage emotionally and playfully with a genre, with implications for civic identity and belonging.

Livingstone, S., J. Allen, and R. Reiner. 2001. The audience for crime media 1946–91: A historical approach to reception studies. *Communication Review* 4.2: 165–192.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10714420109359467
While most explorations of interpretative communities focus on cultural, ethnic, or gendered groups, Livingstone and colleagues make a parallel case in relation to age, exploring how people from four different generations diverge in their interpretation of the same crime news, television, and film texts. Using oral history methods, they show how it

is possible to recover past interpretations of media, and how these past interpretations continue to frame the interpretation of the present.

Moores, S. 2000. *Media and everyday life in modern society*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press. [ISBN: 9780585442136]
Bringing together a focus on the spaces and places of media consumption (such as domestic spaces and neighborhood spaces) and the social relations characterizing these sites of consumption, Moores locates the embeddedness of the media within everyday practices, conversations, and events. Moores looks at a range of different media as well as its consumption within a variety of locales, each with its specific social relations.

Neuman, W. R., M. R. Just, and A. N. Crigler. 1992. *Common knowledge: News and the construction of political meaning*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press. [ISBN: 9780226574394]
Converging a range of methods—surveys, content analysis, in-depth interviews and experimental methods—this book seeks to establish the foundations and functioning of "common knowledge," the repertoire of everyday, continuous feelings, beliefs, information, and ideas held by citizens about political issues.

Radway, J. 1985. Interpretive communities and variable literacies: The functions of romance reading. In *Mass communication review yearbook*. Vol. 5. Edited by M. Gurevitch and M. R. Levy. Beverly Hills: Sage. [ISBN: 9780803924994]
This paper, and indeed the *Reading the romance* project (Radway 1984, cited under *Classic Studies of Audience Reception*), follows Fish's notion of interpretive communities to show that meanings (textual interpretations) are constructed through the specific strategies of communities that share interpretive resources. Redway departs from Fish's treatment of interpretive communities in the sense that her communities are not literary analysts but rather social groups.

Seiter, E., H. Borchers, G. Kreutzner, and E.-M. Warth, eds. 1989. *Remote control: Television audiences and cultural power*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415036054]
The essays in the collection bring together divergences between the paradigms of administrative and critical research, and help establish how the debates within audience research have often represented broader debates within the field of media and communications. Indeed, as the editors point out, the essays in this volume exist in an "uneasy relationship" with mainstream mass communications research in the United States. See in particular essays by Morley and Ang.

Tomlinson, J. 1991. *Cultural imperialism: A critical introduction*. London: Continuum. [ISBN: 0861877462]
Influenced by audience reception studies conducted around the world, particularly those revealing how local cultures make sense of globally exported texts in their own ways, according to local conditions of life, Tomlinson sets out the case for the hybrid phenomenon of "glocalization." This case demonstrates that locally grounded interpretative communities have the symbolic power to reinscribe meanings into texts carrying dominant norms from other cultures. The study of glocalization challenged theories of cultural and media imperialism (namely, that Western mass media companies export their meanings around the world as effectively as they do their products).

Linking Identity and Genre

For media, communication, and cultural studies, research on audience reception has meant that, at the level of the interpretative reader or viewer, the role of the reader (Eco 1979, cited under *Core Texts*) in relation to the text could be theorized and investigated, resulting in new empirical and critical insights regarding audiences, all embedded within detailed empirical accounts of lived media-related practices in everyday life (Liebes and Katz 1990, cited under *Classic Studies of Audience Reception*). Second, the activities and consequences of processes of audience interpretation and reception could be recognized more widely, beyond the field of media studies in particular. Despite the concept of "audience" being a media-oriented (though not necessarily overly media-centric) construct, audience interpretation has now been rendered visible in relation to people's other social and cultural roles—as citizens and consumers, workers and family members, participants in mainstream cultures and subcultures, within and across diverse national boundaries. Most importantly, questions of identity have been explored through the audience's relation with genre, beginning with a rethinking of "women's genres" (Gray 1992; Kearney 2011; cf. Modleski 1982, cited under *Core Texts*), especially the soap opera (Brown 1994, Buckingham 1987), and expanding out to recognize the interpretative role of audiences also in relation to reality television (Hill 2007; Skeggs and Wood 2012) and other genres (Richardson and Corner 1986; Schlesinger, et al. 1992). It should be noted that the focus on audiences as active interpreters is, in itself, historically contingent, a feature of late modernity, for previous periods have seen very different notions of the "audience" (Butsch 2000).

Butsch, R. 2000. *The making of American audiences: From stage to television 1750–1990*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press. [ISBN: 9780521662536]
A detailed historical account of the shaping of audiences through the ages. Richard Butsch reveals that conceptions of audiences as active or passive in their reception of media have long been contested, and that the valuation of either activity or passivity is itself contextually specific. Both activity and passivity, when attached to less-valued groups (women, children, the working class), have thus attracted moral and regulatory consequences.

Brown, M. E. 1994. *Soap opera and women's talk: The pleasure of resistance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. [ISBN: 9780803943926]
Mary Ellen Brown's account of the resistive pleasure and empowering potential within the reception of a "trashy" genre such as the soap opera challenges hegemonic understandings of feminism, womanhood, and femininity. Of particular interest is the attention paid to the resistive potential of laughter and community in women's discussions of television programs.

Buckingham, D. 1987. *Public secrets: EastEnders and its audience*. London: British Film Institute. [ISBN: 9780851702100]
Developing the claim that the soap opera genre is designed as an open text to stimulate audience deliberation over the ethical dilemmas and micro-political struggles of everyday life, especially among the working classes, David Buckingham draws on the reception-aesthetic approach to reveal the practical debates and contestation that this popular UK soap opera occasions among its young audiences. He also notes how this audience is differentiated by gender and class issues.

Gray, A. *Video playtime: The gendering of a leisure technology*. London: Routledge, 1992. [ISBN: 9780203135501]
Gray focuses on the gendered and classed nature of interactions with technology within the home. She brings together Bourdieu's writings on class and Chodorow's writings on gender to investigate the relationships that women develop with media technologies, in particular the video recorder (back then a new device for time shifting).

Hill, A. 2007. *Restyling factual TV: Audiences and news, documentary and reality genres*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415379557]
Annette Hill reveals audiences' puzzled but determined efforts to make sense of the ongoing experimentation with the boundaries of the once-predictable genre of factual television. With reality TV leading the way in genre hybridization and boundary pushing, audiences prove thoughtful, critical, and far from hoodwinked in their responses. Often, indeed, the textual play with "the real" satisfies a wider concern among audiences over what is real and how reality may be determined in today's age of spectacle and appearance.

Kearney, M. C., ed. 2011. *Mediated girlhoods: New explorations of girls' media culture*. New York: Peter Lang. [ISBN: 9781433105616]
Building on the recent burgeoning of interest in studies of girlhood, Mary Celeste Kearney brings together some fascinating essays exploring how girls variously engage with, and negotiate the meanings of, the many mainstream texts that would seem, on the face of it, to oppress them and undermine their voice. Including such texts as *High school musical,* hip hop music, Hollywood file, children's drama, and online websites, the authors reveal how girls can find identity-affirming meanings "under the radar" of the dominant culture.

Richardson, K., and J. Corner. 1986. Reading reception: Mediation and transparency in viewers' accounts of a TV programme. *Media, Culture and Society* 8.4: 485–508. http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/8/4/485
This paper explores how modes of viewing, and subsequent discussions about viewing, included or excluded the recognition of non-fiction television as "motivated discourse." Responses from sixteen Liverpool residents are categorized as transparent, mediated, displaced, or manipulative.

Schlesinger, P., R. E. Dobash, R. Dobash, and K. W. Weaver. 1992. *Women viewing violence*. London, UK: BFI Publishing. [ISBN: 9780851703305]
An exemplary demonstration of the power of reception studies to throw new light on some old puzzles. Taking up a full day of alternating viewings and discussions with groups of women of different ages and backgrounds, some of whom have directly experienced violence themselves, Schlesinger and colleagues sensitively explore why and how women view such scenes. As they reveal, generic context matters—violence in a film, a soap opera, and a documentary are all interpreted differently. Further, personal experience and life politics contribute to differences in the women's emotional and interpretative responses to these texts. (See also the authors' later volume, *Men viewing violence*).

Skeggs, B., and H. Wood. 2012. *Reacting to reality television: Performance, audience and value*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415693714]
In seeking to understand the extraordinary popularity of the genre of reality television around the world, the authors invite a close reading from audiences (especially those of contrasting social class backgrounds) of the genre's presentation of everyday social relations, emotions, and often humiliation. The study reveals how identity, inequality, and

morality are constructed through the emotive and value-laden processes of viewing, eroding traditional boundaries between spectator and performer, audience at home, and audience on the screen.

Cultural Diversity

The focus on identity and culture, as in Banaji 2008, Mankekar 1999, Gillespie 1995, and Georgiou 2012—again often, though not always, explored in relation to particular texts or genres (such as news or soap opera)—has brought audience studies into direct engagement with sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and others interested in gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and nationality. Audience researchers have successfully addressed the intersections of race, class, politics, ethnicity, religion (Clark 2002), and sexuality in their projects, nuancing understanding of audience subjectivities. The intersection of religion, class, and notions of an ideal femininity intersect discussions of nation and national identity in Mankekar 1999, an account of the reception of an Indian epic, for instance. In situating this diverse work as fundamentally concerned with audiences (or audiencing), these researchers have allowed for the wider recognition of variously mediated communicative conditions. These conditions span multiple genres across print, broadcast, and interactive media. In each case, it is at the intersection of text and context that meaning is produced in the act of reading. In reception studies, the notion of genre encompasses the demands placed on audiences by the *form* of the text (e.g., whether it is a reality television program or a documentary), as well as the expectations held of the text by audiences (at the level of the individual and the culture). Taken together, the representative attributes of the text and the interpretive pathways it affords (often encompassed by the idea of "discourse") and the contexts and resources within which audiences engage with texts complete the interpretative contract that has long interested researchers of identity, media, and culture. Highlighted in this section are ways in which reception studies have especially engaged with research on sexual, racial, religious, national, and transnational identities—irrevocably connecting reception studies with the politics of identity and culture.

Banaji, S. 2008. Fascist imaginaries and clandestine critiques: Young Hindi film viewers respond to love, violence and xenophobia in cross-border romances. In *War, enemy and Hindi Films: Filming the line of control*. Edited by Meenakshi Bharat and Nirmal Kumar. New Delhi: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415460941]
   A careful analysis of how, contrary to text-led assumptions that audiences would read films of love crossing the Indian-Pakistani border in a prejudiced or nationalist way, Banaji uncovers the semiotic and political complexities of audience readings. The process of reception is demonstrated to be variously inflected by romantic desire, cultural critique, and self-reflexivity.

Clark, L. S. 2002. U.S. adolescent religious identity, the media, and the "funky" side of religion. *Journal of Communication* 52.4: 794–811.
   http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2002.tb02574.x/pdf
   This essay presents a multiyear ethnographic project that examined how young Americans talk about religion and entertainment media. Clark discusses five ways in which stories from the media are either "rejected or incorporated into what young people claim are their religious beliefs."

Georgiou, M. 2012. Watching soap opera in the diaspora: Cultural proximity or critical proximity? *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35.5: 868–887. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.628040
This essay advocates the retention of the theory of "cultural proximity" in relation to diasporic audiences viewing soap operas from their homelands. Georgiou demonstrates that "soap opera viewing provides female audiences in the diaspora with opportunities to reflect on their own gender identities as distant from hegemonic discourses of gender in their region of origin but as proximate to a moral set of values they associate with this same region."

Gillespie, M. 1995. *Television, ethnicity and cultural change*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415096744]
An in-depth ethnography that integrates reception studies with media consumption to reveal how British Asian families in a South London suburb use media texts— both diasporic and national/mainstream—to negotiate their ethnic identity and hybrid cultural positioning within a multicultural city.

Jensen, K., ed. 1998. *News of the world: World cultures look at television news*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415161077]
A model of a cross-national study of audience reception, applying a common methodology to examine how audiences in very different countries across the globe respond to the fast-growing volume of national and international news available to them. As continued globalization brings with it increased calls for comparative research, this methodology represents a significant model for efforts to adopt a standardized (more than contextualized or localized) analysis of audience reception across countries.

Kim, Y. 2005. *Women, television and everyday life in Korea: Journeys of hope*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415369039]
Kim situates the task of audience reception in a subtle ethnographic account of Korean women's lives, insightfully showing the ties between reception and context, while offering a sympathetic portrayal of the possibilities and, more often, the constraints that define many women's lives.

Mankekar, P. 1999. *Screening culture, viewing politics: An ethnography of television, womanhood, and nation in postcolonial India*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press. [ISBN: 9780822323570]
An excellent ethnography of television viewing in India, amongst urban lower- and middle-class women, this book explores how themes of femininity, caste, class, motherhood, womanhood, family, and religion are portrayed in state television, and how these issues are negotiated by women in the contexts of their everyday lives.

Parameswaran, R. 1999. Western romance fiction as English-language media in postcolonial India. *Journal of Communication* 29.2: 84–105. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02806.x/pdf
This article examines the reception of imported Western romance novels among women in postcolonial India. The author shows that romance novels are found to be pleasurable because they are an extension of Indian women's childhood English-language reading, and they are viewed as "resources to improve English-language skills and to bolster readers' identities as cosmopolitan women."

Parameswaran, R. 2001. Feminist media ethnography in India: Exploring power, gender, and culture in the field. *Qualitative Inquiry* 7.1: 69–103. http://qix.sagepub.com/content/7/1/69.full.pdf
This article is important for contemporary ethnographic approaches to reception studies, as it challenges key binaries that have dominated much of ethnographic research—such as self/other, native/Westerner, and insider/outsider. It considers the implications of "research by non-Western feminist scholars in their own cultures for postcolonial feminist ethnography, feminist media ethnographies, and for media reception research on globalization in the cultural studies tradition."

Questions of Method

This bibliography has indicated diverging paradigms in approaching audiences and in attempts at converging them. While there have been theoretical differences between these different schools of thought, these have often also been expressed in methodological approaches (Höijer 1990). Mass communications research, in the American tradition, particularly approaches grouped into "administrative" research (as opposed to "critical" research), was seen to adopt quantitative methods of researching audiences (see Ang 1990 for a critique of empirical audience research methods). The survey, or even experimental methods, with roots in cognitive and behavioral approaches are examples. On the other hand, the American cultural studies tradition, which in its early days had strong linkages with the British Cultural Studies tradition, adopted qualitative approaches—ethnography, interviewing, focus groups, and observational methods. The two traditions diverge significantly—while quantitative approaches seek to generalize and work with large samples, qualitative approaches aim to produce nuanced and in-depth analyses of cultural processes. While there has been a general recognition that it is possible to converge these approaches in some projects, very few have actually succeeded in such an attempt. Another question that reception research has dealt with in recent years is the aptness of methodological innovation in the face of converging media environments (Gauntlett 2007, Buckingham 2009). Texts that grapple with these questions, and sometimes exemplify solutions to long-standing problems, are identified in this section.

Ang, I. 1990. *Desperately seeking the audience*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415052702]
Ang argues that interpretation and its consequences escape traditional efforts to measure audiences, particularly those practiced by the industry that are so vital for the economy of advertising and television production (notably, audience share, reach, and ratings). Measurements of "eyeballs on the screen" or "bums on seats" will never grasp the meanings that audiences find in television and, therefore, never understand the circulation of meanings or the reasons for audience engagement. Insofar as the industry seeks to make audiences predictable and controllable through its increasingly sophisticated techniques of measurement, the irony is that all the more does audience reception and interpretation carry the potential for resistance.

Buckingham, D. 2009. Creative visual methods in media research: Possibilities, problems and proposals. *Media, Culture & Society* 31.4: 633–652. http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/31/4/633
This essay offers a critique of the recent trend to develop "creative" methods to study audiences. Faced with the claim (e.g., Gauntlett 2007) that such methods offer an insight into spontaneous experiences of and with the media that elude other, more traditional self-

report methods, the author is critical, opening up a debate about how to study audiences in a digital age.

Gauntlett, D. 2007 *Creative explorations: New approaches to identities and audiences*. London: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415396585]
In this book David Gauntlett seeks an alternative to traditional social scientific research methods and instead asks participants to use visual devices—video, collage, and drawing—and to interpret them. Gauntlett suggests that visual and creative methods provide access to data about how people ordinarily interpret media texts—data that would otherwise not be accessible if participants were just asked to describe their experiences.

Höijer, B. 1990. Studying viewers' reception of television programmes: Theoretical and methodological considerations. *European Journal of Communication* 5.1: 29–56. http://ejc.sagepub.com/content/5/1/29
This essay critically appraises the assumptions underlying processes of data collection, transcription, and analysis in qualitative audience research by using a cognitive approach. Höijer identifies the theoretical rationale for different methodological decisions at each phase of the research process.

Höijer, B. 2008. Ontological assumptions and generalizations in qualitative (audience) research. *European Journal of Communication* 23.3: 275–294. http://ejc.sagepub.com/content/23/3/275
Höijer interrogates the various ontological assumptions underlying the methodology of qualitative (audience research) and juxtaposes these with the persistent lacuna often observed within qualitative research—the lack of generalizability. The essay provides a critique of the qualitative methods commonly used in reception studies, with a particular focus on unresolved problems in the use of individual and focus group interviews to provide accounts of audiences' interpretations of media texts.

Lunt, P., and S. Livingstone. 1996. Rethinking the focus group in media and communications research. *Journal of Communication* 46.2: 79–98. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1996.tb01475.x/pdf
This article traces the present use of focus groups in reception studies back to the origins of the method in early sociological and communication research in order to highlight the methodological decisions that face a researcher designing a project in this field. The authors seek to contrast the use of the focus group for the efficient collection of individual views with those uses that reflexively encompass the social dynamics of the focus group—as a simulacrum of the sociality of everyday discourse.

Macgregor, B., and D. E. Morrison. 1995. From focus groups to editing groups: A new method of reception analysis. *Media, Culture & Society* 17.1: 141–150. http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/17/1/141
This article sets out an innovative method for bringing out the implicit interpretative acts involved in television audience reception. Within the format of the focus group discussion, the researchers provide participants with images to make up a news item and invite them to construct the news story, talking aloud about the rationale for their selections and ordering. By asking audiences to simulate the task of news production, the authors reveal the implied and actual reader.

Schröder, K., K. Drotner, S. Kline, and C. Murray. 2003. *Researching audiences*. London: Arnold. [ISBN: 9780340762752]
A key introduction to the variety of methods employed in empirical audience research, this book focuses on a hands-on approach to "doing" audience research. It draws attention to the strengths and limitations of a range of methods, following four traditions—ethnographic analyses, reception studies, experimental methods, and the survey. Each approach is dealt with in depth, setting out its history, main uses in the field, core assumptions, and limitations. The methodological decisions involved in employing each method is demonstrated clearly through worked case studies.

Wood, H. 2007. The mediated conversational floor: An interactive approach to reception analysis. *Media, Culture & Society* 29.1: 75–103. http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/29/1/75
In her "text in action" approach, Wood develops a new approach to trace how audience reception engages with the specificities of media texts. By the deceptively simple means of dividing the page to put the transcript of the text on one half and the transcript of an interview with a viewer interpreting the text on the other half, the exact interpretative linkages between the two stand out. Wood thereby demonstrates a fundamental element of reception studies, namely, that it is not (simply) that audiences respond differently to a text after viewing, but the very meaning they construct from the text itself differs. The same text means something different to different viewers and thus has no unique meaning in and of itself (cf. Livingstone 1998, cited under *Approaches to Audience Reception*).

Interpretion/Reception in the Digital Age

Media environments are converging across platforms, genres, and contents. As a result, the experience of audiences—as viewers, listeners, users, and interpreters—is also converging. Projects that examine audiences by medium, platform, or genre can no longer ignore this transformation. Audience research that has often, until now, clustered studies by genre is therefore repositioning itself to include the users and creators of all forms of media. Conceptually, various linkages between audiences and users are now being theorized. There is a renewed interest in the theoretical repertoire of audience reception studies that was developed in relation to print and broadcast media environments, with scholars examining whether there are insights that are instructive and worthy of retention in the age of new media (Livingstone 2004, Livingstone 2008). This interest is reflected also in calls for caution by audience researchers, who warn us against over-celebrating user agency and activity or mistaking every use of new media to be uniformly creative or participatory (Bird 2011, Carpentier 2011). In this section, articles that in recent years have paid attention to these conceptual questions in linking audiences and users within a shared theoretical framework have been selected.

Bird, E. 2011. Are we all produsers now? Convergence and media audience practices. *Cultural Studies* 25.4–5: 502–516. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2011.600532
In this article, Elizabeth Bird questions our celebratory discourses around active users, user agency, and producers. She draws attention to how over-celebrating the creativity of "producers" may lead to ignoring non-web-based audience practices and audience practices in non-Western countries and cautions us against adopting a narrative of uniform digital literacy, creativity, and participation in the "Web 2.0" age.

Carpentier, N. 2011. Contextualising author-audience convergences. 'New' technologies' claims to increased participation, novelty and uniqueness. *Cultural Studies* 25.4–5: 517–533. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2011.600537
In this article, Nico Carpentier maps audience reception theory along two main dimensions —the active/passive and the interaction/participation dimension. He then reports from three projects—the BBC's *Video nation* project in the United Kingdom, a reception study of nine films on the Belgian online video-sharing platform 16plus, and formal participatory (alternative and community media) organizations, to problematize the "claims of novelty and uniqueness that 'new' participatory technologies have generated."

Corner, J. 2009. Public knowledge and popular culture: Spaces and tensions. *Media, Culture & Society* 31.1: 141–149. http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/31/1/141
In a recent version of an essay from 1991, Corner maintains that "the next decade of research will have the public/popular interplay, framed by broader economic, political and technological factors, running through its agenda of inquiry." He focuses on how recent developments in the world, as well as within media research, have blurred boundaries between Western conception of the public and private. He uses instances from the worldwide web, from the genre of reality television, and from various other projects to make his point.

Livingstone, S. 2004. The challenge of changing audiences: Or, what is the audience researcher to do in the internet age? *European Journal of Communication* 19.1: 75–86. http://ejc.sagepub.com/content/19/1/75
This essay, along with Livingstone 2008, proposes that the advent of interactive media challenges but does not render reception studies obsolete. Examines which concepts and claims from the study of television reception (and the age of mass communication) can be extended into the study of Internet usage (and the age of networked communication).

Livingstone, S. 2008. Engaging with media: A matter of literacy? *Communication, Culture and Critique* 1.1: 51–62. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2007.00006.x/pdf
This essay argues that, insofar as audience reception studies can be incorporated into the wider enterprise of new media studies, it is worthwhile scoping the significant parallels between audience reception and the study of media (and increasingly popular digital) literacies. Both reception studies and media literacy studies draw on the interpretative paradigm, both are concerned with the dynamic interaction between texts and readers, and though exploration of these parallels, audience reception studies need not be left behind in the digital age but instead, integrated with work on digital literacy and accorded a renewed value.

Livingstone, S., and R. Das. 2013. The end of audiences? Theoretical echoes of reception amidst the uncertainties of use. In *The Blackwell companion to new media dynamics*. Edited by J. Hartley, J. Burgess, and A. Bruns. Oxford: Blackwell.[ISBN: 9781444332247]
Faced with a sense of radical change in the media environment, this essay argues for the continued validity of the theory developed for audience reception of television in the Internet age. It looks back through research on, first, oral literacy, then print literacy, then audio-visual media reception in order to develop an array of productive concepts to understand how people engage with contemporary media—not only in terms of motivation, choice, or habit but also in semiotic terms, whether people mean they are accepting, creative, or critical in relation to media texts old and new.

Oddey, A., and C. White, eds. 2009. *Modes of spectating*. Bristol: Intellect. [ISBN: 9781841502960]
A diverse and lively collection of essays that applies the insights of interpretative and reception theories to such phenomena of the digital media age as the virtual reality site, the interactive film, and a variety of digital performative spaces of creative endeavor and audience participation both online and offline.

Empirical Explorations

In the essays annotated in this section, these conceptual concerns find an empirical dimension as audience researchers have begun applying their conceptual repertoires to a range of different communicative environments and audience research is increasingly trans-genre and transmedia in nature. Film audiences, for instance, are also often content-producing audiences on fan sites; for users of multiplayer online games, their relationships with characters, narratives, and plots now spill out of game into the extra-textual products (fanzines, merchandising, linked films or magazines). Cross-branded material means that the original medium (e.g., the Harry Potter books) is no longer the primary source, and it is the cross-media product (such as the Harry Potter brand) with which audiences engage, tracing it across many different media formats. In response, some researchers are theorizing the entire "media repertoires" of audiences (see Hasebrink and Popp 2006), while others are tailoring old methods to new circumstances (for instance, Gauntlett 2007, cited under *Questions of Method*). Nonetheless, the empirical priorities emergent from many decades of audience research continue to be instructive, as the range of conceptual tools mobilized by audience researchers continues to be significant in the age of user-generated content.

Baym, N. 2000. *Tune in, log on: Soaps, fandom, and online community*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. [ISBN: 9780761916482]
In this innovative ethnography of an online soap opera fan group, this book enables the transfer of theory, methods, and findings from television audiences and the age of the Internet. As exploration of the fan activities reveals, interpretation is a profoundly collaborative act, with fans drawing on intra-, inter- and extra-textual resources in order to make sense of the soap opera.

Bolin, G. 2010. Digitization, multiplatform texts, and audience reception. *Popular Communication* 8.1: 72–83. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15405700903502353
In this essay on the significance of digitization for television production, the author reflects on the implication for changing audience roles. Using Swedish examples of the multiplatform production *The truth about Marika and Labyrint*, the essay challenges the supposed integrity of the text to revisit expectations regarding audience engagement and activity.

Das, R. 2011. Converging perspectives in audience studies and digital literacies. *European Journal of Communication* 26.4: 343–360. http://ejc.sagepub.com/content/26/4/343
This paper extends concepts from one mediated condition (television) to another (the Internet), as it engages with the potential for convergence of selected concepts from audience reception studies with media and digital literacies research. In approaching multi-method qualitative data from a project that researched youthful digital literacies on social networking sites, the paper presents a discussion in terms of anticipations of genre and modes of interpretative engagement.

Evans, E. 2011 *Transmedia television: Audiences, new media and everyday life*. New York: Routledge. [ISBN: 9780415882927]
Exploring the concept of transmediality, Evans uses qualitative methods to investigate how audiences engage with mobile and online content surrounding two British television series. Linking with similar terminologies—for instance, media convergence—Evans's work highlights how transmedia interactions produce a range of other texts surrounding the main televisual texts.

Hasebrink, U., and J. Popp. 2006. Media repertoires as a result of selective media use. A conceptual approach to the analysis of patterns of exposure. *Communications* 31.2: 369–387. dx.doi.org/10.1515/COMMUN.2006.023
This paper presents the findings of a German project that explores how users assemble their "personal repertoires" from the host of media they access and how newer media are integrated into existing repertoires. This is a novel trans-genre and cross-media approach to reception analyses in the age of media convergence.

Jenkins, H. 2003. *Quentin Tarantino's* Star wars? Digital cinema, media convergence, and participatory culture. In *Rethinking media change: The aesthetics of transition*. Edited by D. Thorburn and H. Jenkins, 281–312. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. [ISBN: 9780262201469]
Henry Jenkins explores how audiences' interpretations can, in the era of digitally interactive media, be expressed not only through reception but also through the fan-motivated activities of amateur production. Here he traces empirically the consequences of audience reception, including the more creative and resistant readings audiences make of texts, in relation to media production. He thereby completes the circuit of culture within his empirical analysis, taking the case of *Star wars* fans to show how the original text becomes reinterpreted, remixed, and re-presented to its makers through the diverse activities of its audience.

Wilson, T. 2008. *Understanding media users: From theory to practice*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. [ISBN: 9781405155670]
Applies hermeneutic theories of interpretation to the use of a wide range of technologies, including the mobile phone. Wilson claims literacies and engagement with the media are essentially "ludic," or playful.