

# UC Santa Barbara

## UC Santa Barbara Previously Published Works

### Title

Flow, Home, and Media Pleasures

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6jw6f2j9>

### Journal

The Journal of Popular Culture, 38(5)

### ISSN

0022-3840

### Authors

Harrington, C Lee  
Bielby, Denise D

### Publication Date

2005-08-01

### DOI

10.1111/j.0022-3840.2005.00144.x

Peer reviewed

# Flow, Home, and Media Pleasures

C. LEE HARRINGTON AND DENISE D. BIELBY

## Introduction

STUDIES OF GLOBAL TELEVISION ARE DOMINATED BY THE CORE IDEA OF *flow*, a term that emerged in the 1970s and has been used by industry insiders and media scholars in at least two distinct ways (White). First, flow refers to the planned sequence in which segments or strips of TV programming unfold onscreen—from an aspirin commercial, to *CSI: Miami*, to a weather update, to a split-second blank screen, back to *CSI*, and so on (Williams). Second, flow refers to the movement of television programs and formats through different world markets. For example, the US daytime soap *The Bold and the Beautiful* currently airs in over 100 different markets in at least 45 languages. In this second usage of flow, television is often likened to “an unwanted immigrant population that moves around the globe with the privilege of cultural empire” (White 103). The evolving concept of flow over the past thirty years has generated a “traveling theory” of global television, accompanied by discourses on tourism, migration, global trade, and diaspora, and an image of both TV programs and TV viewers as travelers, tourists, sojourners, exiles, vagabonds, pilgrims, or nomads (Sinclair and Cunningham; White). The mobility of media products and their audiences is assumed by many to define our contemporary world.

In a critique of traveling theory, David Morley argues that our tendency to romanticize all notions of mobility as “intrinsically progressive” (427) leaves the concept of home largely unexamined. By home, Morley refers both to the domestic (or domesticized) physical space(s) in which television is still typically consumed,<sup>1</sup> and to more

---

*The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 38, No. 5, 2005

© 2005 Blackwell Publishing, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA, and PO Box 1354, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK

symbolic ideas of home that include “the local, national, or transnational communities in which people think of themselves as being ‘at home’” (425). These various “spaces of belonging,” Morley argues, are closely linked to media consumption. The concept of home evokes a different (but equally romanticized) imagery from that of flow, emphasizing notions of family, stability, continuity, familiarity, and security. A key question dominating global media studies—that is, what is foreign to whom, and in what ways—requires us to develop a new understanding of the concept of home (428).

We explore these critiques of flow and home in the context of a third concept taken for granted in television studies but implied by both White and Morley: pleasure. Morley’s spaces of belonging suggest an emotional experience that remains largely unexamined, while global flow studies (as White accurately notes) tell us where TV texts start and where they end up, but say little about how and why certain programs, genres, or formats are popular in different parts of the world (White 18). Media scholars approach the concept of pleasure rather awkwardly, alternating between celebrating it (as evidence of consumers’ active engagement with media texts) and dismissing it as inauthentic (that is, wholly at the service of profit-making; Corner 94). We aim to place emotion or affect at the center of current theory-building on the globalization of media fans, a call made by Lawrence Grossberg more than ten years ago but generally overlooked by scholars. This sounds obvious at some level, but the pleasure we get from television viewing must be understood as central to why we watch in the first place.

We focus on several aspects of the relationship between the concepts of flow, home, and media pleasures. First, we examine the literature on television flows and dispersed audiences, or “home” TV consumed in a “foreign” context. Most of the literature on global television flow focuses on imported (or foreign) television entering local markets (e.g., what it means for Italian citizens when *NYPD Blue* shows up on local television). Our interest here is in the reverse: television from home consumed by globally dispersed viewers (e.g., what it means for a US citizen studying in Italy to watch *NYPD Blue* on Italian television). Next, we examine the implications of form and content in terms of pleasure associated with cross-cultural television. The global circulation of narrative content and its impact on local audiences have been frequently studied—how the stories and characters on *Baywatch*, for example, are interpreted in various parts of the world. We know much

less about the implications of format circulation or adaptation to the types of viewer pleasures generated. For example, what does it mean when India imports the format of *Wheel of Fortune* but creates a uniquely Indian version of the show? Finally, we are interested in global TV fans, not global TV viewers. According to Harrington and Bielby (1995), there is an important conceptual distinction between viewers and fans, though it remains hotly debated in fan studies, and its cross-cultural significance is not yet clear.

We focus on soap operas and their audiences, though our arguments are not restricted to soaps alone. In the history of television, soaps have proved uniquely capable of drawing a large and loyal viewer base. Soaps can be considered a global media text in that they are produced in many different countries and are one of the most exported genres of television worldwide (Barker 75). There is a rich diversity of soap operas globally, of course, and the genre itself can be difficult to define.<sup>2</sup> But with few exceptions, soaps direct narrative content at the level of the personal or the everyday, with stories detailing relations between family members, neighbors, lovers, and coworkers. The familiarity of serial content is echoed through its form. For example, in the US context, soaps were deliberately structured, more than 70 years ago now, to mirror the rhythm, pacing, and lived experience of its mostly female, mostly housebound viewership. Airing new episodes five days per week, fifty-two weeks per year, with network repeats or preemptions rare, US soap stories are traditionally told in real time and are deliberately designed to appear unauthored (Allen, *Speaking*). Here, planned television flow intersects with what might be called “household flow,” or the routines of everyday life (Corner). Soap narratives worldwide offer viewers the sense that the fictional communities and characters depicted on screen might actually exist in a parallel universe alongside their own. Through both content and form, then, serials offer a unique televisual site of continuity, intimacy, and familiarity; this site might be thought of as one of the spaces of belonging that Morley refers to with the concept of home.

### “Home” TV in “Other” Places

As noted, the literature on global TV circulation focuses on the impact of imported television on local audiences—that is, how television

functions as a mechanism of cultural imperialism by shaping the needs, tastes, and perspectives of local viewers to the demands of the export culture. Concerns about the cultural dominance of media industries are perhaps inescapable, especially given the most recent wave of corporate mergers in both the global and domestic (US) markets, but a more comprehensive approach is needed. For example, there is an inherent tension between the top-down cultural imperialism approach and the more empirically grounded perspectives that increasingly shape our understanding of how the world television market actually works. Audiences engage with media texts through the local cultural frames that they bring to viewing, listening, or seeing. To assume otherwise vastly oversimplifies the power of an industry on an audience, even if the industry is global in reach, and especially if that audience is international.

Our interest is in home-produced programming watched by viewers in other contexts, whether cultural, national, or geographic (to repeat our earlier example, a US citizen watching *NYPD Blue* while studying in Italy). This particular viewing relationship invokes both the “traveling theory” that Morley critiques and the symbolic notion of home with which he encourages us to engage. In general, consumption of home-based media in other contexts is argued to be about identity construction and maintenance—or, as James Carey puts it, about confirmation rather than information. For example, in his study of international students, Victor Sampedro found that going to the library to read newspapers from home serves as a ritualistic cultural practice that confirms students’ personal identities, links them to a particular cultural space, and celebrates both their sameness and difference. Similarly, Larry Strelitz found that students in South Africa reject foreign television programming and have created a “homeland” viewing space (the students’ term, and politically loaded given South African history) as a way to reconfirm their traditional African value system and construct and maintain a distinct cultural identity.

Through their emphasis on the everyday, soap opera narratives have a unique ability to help define cultural differences, construct national identities, and connect disparate “residents” in all regions of the world. In particular, Latin American telenovelas are able to connect Spanish-speaking peoples worldwide with an “imagined community” (Anderson) that crosses local, national, and transnational borders. As Ana Lopez notes, “each day, a greater number of people throughout the

Spanish-speaking world live with and recognize themselves in the world through telenovela melodramas” (260). Indeed, soap operas are central nation-building devices in all corners of the world. In one of the first empirical studies of Hispanic/Latino viewers watching telenovelas in the United States, Vivian Barrera and Denise Bielby found that novelas help viewers recreate and maintain strong cultural and emotional bonds to Latin America. Through scenery and story-telling devices, use of the Spanish language, visual representation of Latin American styles, and depiction of local traditions, telenovelas allow displaced viewers to “re-experience that which is familiar” (Barrera and Bielby 6). Explains one US viewer,

You feel like you're sharing, like you're partaking of that culture. You're part of it for the time that you are watching. You are appreciating and reacting to things that are intrinsic to that culture. So, it's not at all a sense of watching something weird and foreign, but the sense of being part of something.<sup>3</sup>

Telenovela viewing evokes feelings of homesickness and nostalgia, heightened cultural consciousness, and identity reaffirmation among Hispanics and Latinos living in the United States (Barrera and Bielby; Lopez; Mayer).

However, not all consumption of home-based media reinforces cultural consciousness and constructs (or reconstructs) ethnic identity.<sup>4</sup> For example, Marisea Milikowski concluded that Turkish satellite television, as viewed in the Netherlands by Turkish immigrants, had the unexpected effect of “de-ethnicizing” rather than “ethnicizing” their perception of cultural difference (446).<sup>5</sup> In other words, accessing home-based television weakened, not strengthened, their cultural heritage. Rather than providing immigrants with a way to confirm, reinforce, and sustain previously established ethnic and cultural boundaries, home-based television led them to question those boundaries (444).<sup>6</sup> Following a similar theme, Hamid Naficy suggests in his study of Iranians in Los Angeles that the nostalgic programming typical of Iranian television helps create for both viewers and producers “a sense of stability out of instability and commonality out of alienation . . . television assists . . . exiles in constructing a *hybrid* self and identity, not by producing absences but by multiplying presences of the home and the past and of the here and the now” (539, 560; emphasis added). As Morley reminds us, the question of what is “foreign” to whom (or

what is “home” to whom) is not always clear, and is not always a matter of nationality (438).

### Cross-Border Formatting: Implications for Viewer Reception

A second way of thinking through the relationships between flow, home, and media pleasures is by examining the forms in which media products circulate the globe for their impact on viewers elsewhere. As noted previously, focusing on the impact of imported television on local audiences and on the impact of home-based television on dispersed audiences speaks almost exclusively to questions of program content.<sup>7</sup> How might modifications in format shape viewer reception? We might approach this question in several ways. For example, we might focus on the current industry practice of selling formats rather than programs on the global market, enabling buyers to adapt them in culturally specific ways to local audiences and to create multiple versions of shows in diverse markets around the world (as in the *Wheel of Fortune* example given earlier). From an industry perspective, formats are culturally malleable (and thus marketable) in ways that program content is not, though the impact on dispersed viewers of this type of cross-border traveling remains to be seen (by impact, we mean more than Nielsen or other comparable ratings indicators).

The influence of cross-border formatting on audiences might also be approached through scheduling practices, as in the first meaning of flow discussed earlier (i.e., the planned unfolding of strips or segments on screen). TV programming is often scheduled very differently in importing markets than exporting ones. A prime-time export becomes a daytime import, or a once-per-week export becomes a twice-per-week import, potentially attracting a different viewer demographic, commanding a different level of advertising sponsorship, drawing different critical reception, and raising potentially different questions about viewer reception. Mimi White cautions, however, that “even the purveyors of [global] flow studies acknowledge that the enumeration of where texts start and where they end up does not have much to say about the nature of their reception or interpretation . . . it also says little about the particular, local strategies of [planned] flow in which the texts are inserted” (103–04). More broadly, the concept of planned

flow itself is culturally shaped. For example, Naficy argues in his study of Iranian television in Los Angeles that

the “text” of exilic television is what might be called a “nested text,” in the sense that it is an exilic supertext nested within an exilic flow that is embedded within an ethnic flow which itself is nested within the mainstream television’s megatext. This conception of a multi-lingual nested ethnic televisual flow is radically different from the monolingual, monochannel, monocultural flow that television scholars have formulated and studied. (541)

The scheduling of Iranian television in the United States is very different from mainstream network television in that the highest bidder is permitted to put shows on the air regardless of what genre they are or how popular they are with viewers. The schedule then reflects Iranian viewers’ “own liminal condition, its formlessness, the endlessness of its time, its ambivalence” (Naficy 542). In short, scholars’ reliance on industry practices that constitute the concept of flow encourages us, as White suggests, to rethink what television is, how and for whom it travels, and how it is received in sites and communities both familiar and unfamiliar.

A final way to think about cross-border formatting is through the introduction of a new, culturally distinct (i.e., foreign) format into a preexisting (home) genre, and its subsequent impact on viewers. In other words, how are viewer pleasures modified when familiar genres are made unfamiliar through borrowed or imported adaptations? Here, it is not viewers or programs that become global wanderers, but formats. As an extended example, consider the recently cancelled half-hour US soap opera *Port Charles* (ABC), and its shift from open-ended narratives (continuing stories) to short-arc narratives (thirteen-week stories). While all TV genres evolve or adapt over time in response to industry changes and viewer preferences, the decision to move to a short-arc format in the middle of an ongoing narrative was a radical departure from the history of soap storytelling in the United States. As noted earlier, the appeal of US soaps, along with many other versions of the genre worldwide, is traditionally based, at least in part, on their reproduction of the substance, form, and rhythm of everyday life; a random Tuesday in real life is a random Tuesday on the soaps. The shift to short-term storytelling rewrites this historical contract between soap narratives, their viewers, and soaps’ sense of the everyday, and the shift



has been widely referred to in the industry as the “telenovela-ization” of US soap operas (Bielby and Harrington forthcoming).

It might be nice to think that by adapting a telenovela format, ABC was honoring the cultural and literary traditions of its Latin American neighbors, but such is not the case. The decision was purely economic; the US soap industry is in serious trouble. The domestic audience is rapidly dwindling, and those who are left watching are not very young and not very loyal, which makes soaps’ advertising sponsorship worried (Bauder; Dawn). Many of the genre’s specialties, such as emotional authenticity, emotional payoff, character development, and even seriality, have been adopted by network prime-time and various cable channels. The only soaplike element that is not replicated elsewhere on US television—never-ending storytelling—is increasingly incompatible with viewers’ needs. Network soaps also face growing competition from telenovelas airing on Spanish-language television, and the industry’s recent attempts to woo the rapidly growing Hispanic/Latino market (through, for example, introducing new Latino actors and characters into the show) have had mixed results. (A number of other industry changes are relevant to the growing Hispanic market; see Bielby and Harrington forthcoming.) ABC was thus smart to try something different with *Port Charles*, though the telenovela-ization of the rest of its daytime lineup, which was supposed to begin with *One Life to Live* in 2002, has yet to take place.

To understand the implications of this format adaptation in terms of viewer pleasures, a bit of historical context is useful. *Port Charles* was introduced in 1997 as a spin-off of the popular and long-running *General Hospital*. Struggling in the ratings since its debut, *Port Charles* was threatened with cancellation when ABC shifted to a thirteen-week story-arc format beginning in March 2000. (In a related attempt to save money, the show shifted to a more cost-effective production schedule common to prime time, taping two episodes a day for six months and then going on hiatus for the rest of the year.) Under the short-arc format, the show’s narratives were told in “books” that unfolded one after another, with no break in between. Each book was named after a popular song that served as theme music for the duration and that was designed to reflect the story arc’s narrative content. We emphasize that ABC borrowed only the generalized format of Latin American telenovelas, not their culturally distinctive narrative content. Novelas differ from one another in many ways depending on country of

origin, but in general, they tend toward the romantic and the melodramatic, emphasizing upward social mobility and happy endings (Patterson 105). *Port Charles* did revamp its content to coincide with the format change, but it shifted from a medical drama to a supernatural show featuring vampires and time travel.

What was the impact of introducing a “foreign” (i.e., Latin American) format into a “home” (i.e., American) genre? The new *Port Charles* initially got a mixed reception from both professional critics and the soap audience. For example, Connie P. Hayman, former resident critic at *Soap Opera Weekly* (one of the premier soap fan magazines in the United States), felt that early books were disjointed and the transition between them abrupt, and that the fast-paced plots felt “surreal” in comparison with traditional US soap storytelling (De Lacroix). Shortly after the new format debuted, she wrote that ABC was not so much revolutionizing the art of soap operas as it was compromising it (De Lacroix). *Port Charles* viewers were ambivalent about the show’s tele-novela-ization, as the following quotes reveal:

I thoroughly enjoy the quick-paced format of PC. I’ve never been able to watch traditional soaps because it would take too long to get to the heart of the matter. Frankly, I would lose interest before characters ever got close to making a decision. I like that the [story] arcs concentrate on a group of key characters and take the story through to fruition. (“Love It/Hate It” 52)

Relationships are the heart and soul of soap operas, and in that regard, the new PC is a disaster. Couples are falling in and out of love so fast it’s impossible to care about the relationships. . . . Why should I believe or invest in relationships that are going to be shuffled every 13 weeks? (“Love It/Hate It” 53)

Viewer ambivalence is further illustrated by the results of a non-scientific poll published in *Soap Opera Digest*: 43% of *Port Charles* viewers “loved” the new format, while 55% “hated” it (“Love It/Hate It” 52–53).

The format shift initially brought a slight improvement in the key demographic of 18 to 49-year-old women, but ABC was forced to backpedal to fit the needs of viewers used to open-ended narratives. Early books were clearly distinct from one another, but the show’s writers gradually began to thread together central characters and themes to create a whole out of the various thirteen-week segments.

The segments could be watched as self-contained units, but they also created a loosely continuing narrative that connected the books to one another. This nod to viewer tastes did not permanently improve the show's ratings, however, and ABC ultimately cancelled the show. The last episode aired in October 2003.

To our knowledge, no systematic data speak to the question of how modifications of form in export products or radical adaptations in current story format subsequently modify or shape viewer reception. Our analysis here provides preliminary insight into ways that global television flows—and here we mean format flows rather than program flows—might alter viewer pleasures.

### Cross-Border Fandom and the Concept of Pleasure

The final topic we explore in this discussion of flow, home, and media pleasures is the notion of cross-cultural fandom. We have focused thus far on the generalized TV audience and the various ways that crossing cultural borders—by programs, formats, or persons—shapes viewer reception. Shifting inquiry from viewers to fans raises slightly different questions, but what separates a viewer from a fan? In earlier fan studies, Henry Jenkins and Camille Bacon-Smith suggest that engaging in public or quasi-public activities that support private viewing preferences most clearly distinguishes fans from nonfans. In this perspective, fans are those who write letters to celebrities, attend organized conventions, join fan clubs, participate in online discussions, make scrapbooks, produce fanzines, or create original artwork and short stories featuring favored actors or characters.

This understanding of fan as “doer,” however, obscures an important dimension of fanship: the acceptance and management of a fan identity, which may or may not be expressed through the types of activities just noted. Harrington and Bielby argue that fans are different from casual viewers in that they make a significant emotional investment in cultural objects that speaks to central issues of play, creativity, and subjectivity (see also Grossberg). Media fanship is ultimately about emotional pleasure that is explored through attachments to television programs, films, actors, characters, and so on (Bielby and Harrington, “Public Meanings”). Soap opera fans are unique in that the genre specializes in portraying feelings, and the particular feelings depicted on

screen—that is, love, devotion, heartache, and so on—mirror, in many ways, the same feelings that fans have toward their soaps (Harrington and Bielby 45). The pleasures of television viewing are widely studied,<sup>8</sup> but the emotional engagement of fanship is typically explained away through focus on the various extrinsic needs that pleasure is assumed to serve. Pleasure in and of itself remains analytically elusive.

In *Soap Fans*, Harrington and Bielby offer a psychoanalytically based theory of media fan pleasure. This is somewhat unusual for two sociologists in that sociology typically dismisses psychoanalysis as trans-historical or transcultural (Hills, *Fan Cultures*). However, in *Fan Cultures*, Hills argues that certain psychoanalytic approaches, namely D. W. Winnicott's theory discussed next, can help clarify fan identities and activities in a way that supports fans' own accounts of their emotional attachments to media objects and persons. Harrington and Bielby draw on Winnicott's proposal of three different realms of reality that all human beings inhabit: internal reality, external reality, and an intermediate realm of experience that keeps the inner and outer worlds separate, yet related.<sup>9</sup> Winnicott links this realm to a specific stage in child development—between four and twelve months—during which infants first become capable of perceiving the self as both subject and object. This stage is characterized by the appearance of “transitional objects,” which the infant becomes emotionally attached to but is unable to realize are not fully real (such as a favorite toy). This intermediate realm, characterized by creative play and pleasurable affect, remains with us as adults, though we learn to experience it privately rather than openly.

Harrington and Bielby believe that this realm of experience, which is neither inside nor outside but somewhere in between, is a key site of pleasure in media fandom, where we are able to play with the boundaries between the fictional and the real.<sup>10</sup> More than two decades ago, Dorothy Hobson documented the pleasures of boundary playing in her study of soap opera watchers in the United Kingdom, and her observations are echoed in a number of different studies conducted in a variety of global contexts. However, boundary playing is typically dismissed by scholars as an illusion manufactured by media industries in the ideological pursuit of political acquiescence; as the creation of a mass consumership (which it is, in part); or as a deliberate self-delusion on the part of the hapless (female) viewer seeking to escape the mundanity of her everyday life (Ang; Corner; Fiske; Lavin; Oliveira).

Rarely is the transitional realm of experience taken seriously as a reality in and of itself. We suggest that this psychological realm might be thought of as an affectively based space of belonging, to use Morley's term. In this case, however, the community in which fans think of themselves as being at home is not at the level of the local, national, or transnational, but at the level of the subject; it is an emotional home, if you will (Morley 425).

According to Harrington and Bielby, open-ended daily soap narratives are the perfect TV genre for intermediate realm play. As discussed earlier, soaps are structured to mirror the rhythms and tempos of viewers' daily lives and to provide opportunities for character development unparalleled in media entertainment, and are experienced by long-term viewers as real places populated by real people (Butler; Lavin; Spence). In addition, Sonia Livingstone notes that open-ended forms of the genre provide a considerable role for the viewer to make his or her own interpretations; there are "no objective truths, no answers, no permanent securities, no uncompromised actions, [and] no absolutes" (52). The most intense source of pleasure available to soap fans is through the interplay of fictional narratives and real ones (Harrington and Bielby). For example, actors' real-life pregnancies often force writers to script fictional ones, allowing fans to read the real into the fictional, and vice versa. Even more pleasurable is when a couple romantically linked on screen falls in love off screen as well, thus enabling fans to "witness" how the real-life romance is going through "leakages" in the actors' on-screen portrayals of romance. Perhaps the ultimate opportunity for intermediate realm play occurs with a real-life pregnancy between a real-life couple playing a fictional couple on the soap (as has happened on US daytime). One fan summarizes her pleasure in watching soaps as follows:

Sometimes the characters and actors blend into a believability so strong you almost feel like you're eavesdropping on real lives and it is fascinating to watch them work through their problems and their relationships. . . . There is the reassuring familiarity of a long-running soap—no matter where you are or what's happening in your life there's . . . the anchor characters of your favorite show proving that people do survive grief, pain, sorrow, poverty, betrayal, or whatever . . . The private lives and career patterns of the actors, directors, producers, and network people can be more interesting than what goes on the air . . . often full of intrigue, drama and passion. (qtd. in Harrington and Bielby 118–19)

Fans' merging of fantasy and reality, while a central source of pleasure, is not always appreciated by other members of the soap opera community. For example, Kristina Wagner, who played Felicia on *General Hospital* for many years, was married on screen to the character of Frisco, and off screen to Jack Wagner, Frisco's portrayer. In a magazine interview, the actress stated,

When people see us out in public . . . to them it's like Felicia and Frisco live. . . . To them it's a romantic notion that something that worked pretty well on-camera might actually be going on off-camera to some degree as well. But to me it's like, oh boy, I don't know if I like living a real life and fake life together. I think Felicia and Kristina are very different. (qtd. in Harrington and Bielby 146)<sup>11</sup>

In most cases, fans' intermediate realm play is not a sign of lunacy, but of (rational) pleasure (Harrington and Bielby 111; see also Spence). There are exceptions, of course. There was the bizarre 1992 murder of a popular Brazilian telenovela actress by her on-screen lover, who was distraught at the writers' decision to end the characters' romance. In a comment not very flattering to novela watchers, journalist Alma Guillermoprieto wrote, "Brazilians discovered virtual reality years ago. . . . They never know when they are entering the screen and when they are leaving it" (44). In another example, Hills discusses in *Fan Cultures* the implications of the growing practice of "cult geography": fans visiting the geographical sites where fictionalized events on their favorite shows take place. In an infamous instance from prime-time TV, an *X-Files* fan and her family traveled to Vancouver, where the show was shot. As Hills elaborates, they visited the site where the lead character was kidnapped and put into the trunk of her car, and the fan recreated the scene by tying up her own son, putting him in the trunk, and photographing him (149). While we hesitate to speculate what is going on in these particular instances, we find that in most cases of intermediate realm play, fantasy neither compensates for empty lives nor provides temporary flight from them, but rather adds a crucial dimension to life in providing a setting for emotional desire (Harrington and Bielby; Kaplan).

What happens to fan pleasures when they cross cultural borders? What enhances or limits the possibilities for cross-cultural fandom? There are at least six ways that crossing cultural borders might impact media fandom, though this is certainly not an exhaustive discussion.

First, fans' activities and identities within any given cultural setting are necessarily shaped by the reputation of their object of fandom, which varies cross-culturally and is itself shaped by factors such as (in the case of television) schedule location and target demographics. Many US-based soap fans keep their pleasures private because of the long-standing stigma attached to soaps and soap viewers in the United States (Harrington and Bielby). But as media programming flows around the globe, the specific reputations attached to particular genres or celebrities vary—due in part to differences in scheduling, advertising and promotion, viewership, and culturally based perceptions of “quality” television, among other factors—thus shaping the fandom that surrounds it.

Second, most US soaps packaged for export air months if not years later in importing markets (this is true for other TV genres as well). In the context of continuing stories, this delay impacts viewers' ability to provide feedback on unfolding narratives to soap actors, writers, producers, and the soap press, thus interrupting viewers' sense of “participation” in soap storytelling, however illusory. An important element of the US context is daytime's attempt to create a “we” feeling between industry and audience: these are *all* of our stories, and you, the viewer, are instrumental in telling them (Harrington and Bielby).

Third, delayed airtime due to export factors also means that geographically dispersed fans cannot participate as effectively in certain online activities, which is a hallmark of contemporary media fandom and typically depends on a space-time congruence with the domestic industry's production schedule. In *Fan Cultures*, Hills quotes from a fan's online posting about the defunct prime-time drama *The X-Files*. The fan complained about plot developments being spoiled by home-based fans:

What about people who read newsgroups that aren't in the US or Canada??? I live in England and if I was to wait until the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> season and then write about it on this [newsgroup] I would look stupid as by the time it gets to the cliffhanger, the 5<sup>th</sup> season probably would've started over in the US etc. All I . . . want is for people to put a simple word in the header, SPOILER. It only takes a second to write it. (176)

Fourth, access to certain elements of fandom, such as buying fan magazines or attending conventions, is more constrained by geographic,

economic, and access limitations for foreign fans than for home-based fans (Morley). For example, attending an *All My Children* fan club luncheon when one lives in New York (where the program is taped) is obviously a different prospect than if one lives in Estonia, Israel, or Australia, among the numerous countries in which the soap currently airs (Brennan). Other home-based fan opportunities are not available because of alterations in format for export. For example, during its three and a half hours of daily soap programming, ABC currently offers viewers an opportunity to “Shop the Soaps.” Viewers can buy copies of the jewelry or clothing worn by characters on screen. This network-sponsored promotion is not necessarily preserved in reformatting for export, however, which means that a soap fan in Iowa can buy earrings that a fan in South Africa, alas, cannot—though the South African fan may have opportunities that the Iowan fan does not.<sup>12</sup>

Fifth, we point out that open-ended soap narratives are typically sold on the global market in truncated packages. For example, a distributor might sell one hundred or two hundred episodes of *Guiding Light* extracted from the middle of the narrative. This is, in some sense, yet another way of telenovela-izing US soaps: taking open-ended narratives and transforming them into closed-ended ones for the export market. What is the impact on geographically dispersed fans’ abilities to develop emotional attachments to a character or show that has been transformed in this way? Some fans in the United States have followed *Guiding Light* for all of the 67 years it has aired on radio and television. How does that person’s fanship and fan pleasure vary from the fan in Croatia who can access only one hundred episodes?

Finally, we note that global industry mergers and acquisitions can offer new, unexpected opportunities for media fans. When NBC acquired Mexico’s Telemundo, the entire television industry waited anxiously to see how NBC’s offerings—and Telemundo’s, for that matter—would be shaped by the cross-cultural “engagement” (for lack of a better term) between the two corporations. While most of the industry is still waiting, soap watchers have been exposed to new media celebrities, modes of storytelling, and expressions of fanship—and to each other—at the first joint NBC/Telemundo soap fan festival held in Hollywood in April 2003. Billed as daytime’s first bilingual soap fan event, Fan Festival 2003 featured actors from NBC’s *Passions* and *Days of Our Lives*, as well as some from several of Telemundo’s telenovelas,



and was heralded as an “exciting new dimension” of global soap fandom (“Industry Insider”). The possibilities for cross-cultural fandom are thus shaped by new opportunities and constraints.

## Conclusion

We have suggested in this analysis that current academic discourses on concepts of flow and home imply an affective dimension that must be taken seriously in television studies. By focusing on global flows and dislocated audiences, cross-border formatting, and cross-border fandom, we have attempted to reintroduce the concept of emotional pleasure into the study of television and its audiences. The last twenty years of research on the world market for syndicated television has focused in part on the power of TV as a nation-building mechanism and on the creation of imagined communities among geographically dispersed viewers. Certainly our discussion of home TV consumed in a foreign context reflects this approach. While these communities of viewers have been conceptualized primarily in terms of ethnic or national identities, we find it important to repeat one of David Morley’s central points: that the question of what is foreign to whom and what is local to whom is not always clear. Moreover, it is not always rooted in nationality (438).

The past decade of fan studies has offered interesting insights into the various dimensions by which media communities can emerge and thrive—or, to put it another way, the various elements that constitute home and not home for TV audiences. We argue that any approach to cross-border fanship (rather than viewership), whether psychoanalytically based or not, must emphasize fans’ pleasure, play, and creativity. We thus follow Hills (“Virtually Out”) in suggesting that media fans comprise not an imagined community (to use Benedict Anderson’s seemingly affectless concept; Hills, “Virtually Out” 146), but a community of imagination<sup>13</sup> constituted by “a common affective tie and not merely a common and therefore immediately visible instance of media consumption” (Hills, *Fan Cultures* 180; emphasis removed). In our own analysis, soap fans’ visits to the transitional realm, an imaginative psychological space in which reality and fantasy are deliberately blurred, is also a visit home to a pleasurable place of belonging. Less clear-cut is how cultural borders shape membership in this community.

## NOTES

1. See, however, Anna McCarthy's recent discussion of various forms of nondomestic or ambient television.
2. Most commonly, soaps are divided into two main types based on the presence or absence of narrative closure. Open-ended storytelling is associated with serials produced in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia, while closed-ended serials are more characteristic of Latin America, India, Japan, China, South Africa, and elsewhere (Allen, "As the World Tunes in" 112). Soaps can also be divided thematically in terms of their approach to issues of realism, melodrama, and political and social realities (Matelski; O'Donnell).
3. This quote was taken from an earlier version of Barrera and Bielby's article.
4. By ethnic identity, Milikowski means an identity derived from the country of origin—that is, a national identity outside of the national context.
5. Building on a fundamental sense of belonging and kinship, "ethnicization works at reproducing and strengthening social boundaries [in other locales while] de-ethnicization works at undoing them" (Milikowski 448).
6. Milikowski and Strelitz also remind us that, despite scholars' emphasis on the role of the media in contemporary identity formation and maintenance, other factors such as social location and social networks also help shape modern identities.
7. For an exception, see Naficy's discussion of the Iranian television magazine format in Los Angeles.
8. For example, in a recent publication, John Corner offers a typology of television pleasures that includes visual pleasure, pleasures of parasociality, dramatic pleasures, pleasures of knowledge, pleasures of comedy, and pleasures of fantasy (94–98). In contrast, John Fiske distinguishes between three categories of television pleasures: the psychoanalytic, the physical, and the social.
9. Ronald Lembo and Kenneth Tucker first suggested that television can serve as a transitional object; Harrington and Bielby (135) argue that soap operas are uniquely situated to do so because they offer a continuing fictional community to viewers who then, quite knowledgeably, interpret the real through the fictional and the fictional through the real.
10. According to Hills in *Fan Cultures*, Winnicott is not clear about the distinction between the transitional object proper and the transitional space of cultural experience. While a full discussion of Hill's critique is beyond the scope of our analysis here, we would argue that Harrington and Bielby's application of Winnicottian theory makes important advances in sociology, where insight rarely goes beyond how labeling or other processes of attribution define fanship as deviance. By bringing Winnicott's approach to bear on fanship, Harrington and Bielby shift sociological insights into fanship from categorical typifications of deviance to ones that explain fanship as a continuum of activities, involvements, and interests. Understanding variation in behavior (of any kind) is a central tenet of sociology.
11. Some industry insiders, however, report their own version of boundary playing. For example, actress Beth Ehlers, who plays Harley on *Guiding Light*, explained her real-life romantic fling with on-screen partner Mark Derwin (Mallet) as follows: "Sometimes, I think Mark and I started going out with each other because Harley and Mallet were going out. You get confused about whether it's really happening on the screen or in your heart" (Dawn, "Close-Up" 29). Similarly, Hogan Sheffer, head writer of *As the World Turns*, says that his external reality often merges with that of Oakdale, the fictional setting of *World*: "It's like remembering a place you've never been, and the memories can be really textural. Like what it would smell like in [a character's] house. It's always in my head. I can't help it" (MacFarquhar 71).
12. Industry courtship of organized or formalized TV fan groups is growing rapidly. As viewers become increasingly difficult to capture, due in part to increased competition in the global

market, fans are being targeted worldwide as a desirably loyal niche market (Hills, *Fan Cultures*; Sinclair and Cunningham). Explains one television executive at a recent industry gathering, "You need to start changing people into fans of the brand, people who really want to engage in the brand, because this is no longer an atmosphere in which you can push yourself on the consumer, you're going to have to pull them in" (Kuperman). Increasingly, publicity industries in both importing and exporting markets cooperate with one another to secure a local fan base for imported programming (Bowles).

13. Hills (2001) intentionally refers to a community of imagination rather than a community of *the* imagination, arguing that the "syntax of the latter implies that imagination can be thought of as a definite article, and can therefore be located as an objective or subjective state. However, the implication of the phrase 'community of imagination' is two-fold: first, that imagination is conceptualized as an *affective process* which underpins the formation and fragility of any such community, and second, that this process is conceptualized as belonging distinctively *between* 'objective' and 'subjective' spaces" (158 fn. 1; emphasis in original).

## Works Cited

- Allen, Robert C. *Speaking of Soap Operas*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1985.
- . "As the World Tunes in: An International Perspective." *Worlds without End: The Art and History of the Soap Opera*. Ed. Museum of Radio and Television. New York: Abrams, 1997. 111–19.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Ang, Ien. *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Bacon-Smith, Camille. *Enterprising Women*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1992.
- Barker, Chris. *Global Television*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.
- Barrera, Vivian, and Denise D. Bielby. "Places, Faces, and Other Familiar Things: The Cultural Experience of Telenovela Viewing among Latinos in the United States." *Journal of Popular Culture* 34 (2001): 1–18.
- Bauder, David. "Do Soaps Have More Lives to Live?" *Cincinnati Enquirer* 2 Aug. 2001: E-3.
- Bielby, Denise D., and C. Lee Harrington. "Public Meanings, Private Screenings: The Formation of Social Bonds through the Televisual Experience." *Perspectives on Social Problems*. Ed. Gale Miller and James A. Holstein. Vol. 3. Greenwich: JAI Press, 1992. 155–78.
- . "Opening Up America? The Telenovela-ization of U.S. Soap Operas." *Television & New Media* (forthcoming).
- Bowles, Kate. "Soap Opera: 'No end of story, ever'." *The Australian TV Book*. Ed. Graeme Turner and Stuart Cunningham. New South Wales, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000. 117–29.

- Brennan, Steve. "ABC's 'Children' Goes Worldwide." *Hollywood Reporter* 24 Aug. 2001 (<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com>).
- Butler, Jeremy G. "I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV': Characters, Actors and Acting in Television Soap Opera." *To Be Continued: Soap Operas around the World*. Ed. Robert C. Allen. London: Routledge, 1995. 145–63.
- Carey, James W. *Communication as Culture*. Boston: Unwin & Hyman, 1988.
- Corner, John. *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.
- Dawn, Randee. "Close-Up and Personal." *Soap Opera Digest* 14 Aug. 2001: 28–31.
- . "Bubble Burst." *Soap Opera Digest* 13 Aug. 2002: 56–58.
- De Lacroix, Marlana. "PC: Fast-Food Soap Opera." *Soap Opera Weekly* 6 Feb. 2001: 12.
- Fiske, John. *Television Culture*. New York: Methuen, 1987.
- Grossberg, Lawrence A. "Is There a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom." *The Adoring Audience*. Ed. Lisa A. Lewis. New York: Routledge, 1992. 50–65.
- Guillermoprieto, Alma. "Obsessed in Rio." *New Yorker* 16 Aug. 1993: 44–55.
- Harrington, C. Lee, and Denise D. Bielby. *Soap Fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995.
- Hills, Matt. "Virtually Out There: Strategies, Tactics and Affective Spaces in On-Line Fandom." *Technospaces: Inside the New Media*. Ed. Sally R. Munt. London and New York: Continuum, 2001. 146–50.
- . *Fan Cultures*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Hobson, Dorothy. *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera*. London: Methuen, 1982.
- "Industry Insider: NBC Announces Fan Fest 2003." *Soap Opera Weekly* 18 Feb. 2003: 8.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Kaplan, Cora. "The Thorn Birds: Fiction, Fantasy, Femininity." *Formations of Fantasy*. Ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan. New York: Methuen, 1986. 142–66.
- Kuperman, Bob. "The Living Curriculum: When the Advertiser Turns Producer." Videotaped seminar. Los Angeles: NATPE Educational Foundation, 2001.

- Lavin, Marilyn. "Creating Consumers in the 1930s: Irna Phillips and the Radio Soap Opera." *Journal of Consumer Research* 22 (1995): 75–89.
- Lembo, Ronald, and Kenneth H. Tucker. "Culture, Television, and Opposition: Rethinking Cultural Studies." *Critical Studies in Mass Communications* 7 (1990): 97–116.
- Livingstone, Sonia. *Making Sense of Television: The Psychology of Audience Interpretation*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Lopez, Ana M. "Our Welcomed Guests: Telenovelas in Latin America." *To Be Continued: Soap Operas around the World*. Ed. Robert C. Allen. London: Routledge, 1995. 256–75.
- "Love It/Hate It." *Soap Opera Digest* 27 Feb. 2001: 52–53.
- MacFarquhar, Larissa. "Oakdale Days." *New Yorker* 15 Apr. 2002: 64–71.
- Matelski, Marilyn J. *Soap Operas Worldwide: Cultural and Serial Realities*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999.
- Mayer, Vicki. "Living Telenovelas/Telnovelizing Life: Mexican American Girls' Identities and Transnational Telenovelas." *Journal of Communication* 53 (2003): 479–95.
- McCarthy, Anna. *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space*. Durham: Duke UP, 2001.
- Milikowski, Marisea. "Exploring a Model of De-Ethnicization: The Case of Turkish Television in the Netherlands." *European Journal of Communication* 15 (2000): 443–68.
- Morley, David. "Belongings: Place, Space and Identity in a Mediated World." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4 (2001): 425–48.
- Naficy, Hamid. "The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles." *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Simon During. London: Routledge, 1999. 537–63.
- O'Donnell, Hugh. *Good Times, Bad Times: Soap Operas and Society in Western Europe*. London: Leicester UP, 1999.
- Oliveira, Omar Souki. "Brazilian Soaps Outshine Hollywood: Is Cultural Imperialism Fading Out?" *Beyond National Sovereignty: International Communication in the 1990s*. Ed. Kaarle Nordenstreng and Herbert I. Schiller. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1993. 116–31.
- Patterson, R. "Drama and Entertainment." *Television: An International History*. Ed. A. Smith. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995. 95–117.
- Sampedro, Victor. "Grounding the Displaced: Local Media Reception in a Transnational Context." *Journal of Communication* 48 (1998): 125–43.
- Sinclair, John, and Stuart Cunningham. "Go with the Flow: Diasporas and the Media." *Television & New Media* 1 (2000): 11–31.

- Spence, Louise. "‘They Killed Off Marlina but She’s on Another Show Now’: Fantasy, Reality and Pleasure in Watching Daytime Soap Operas." *To Be Continued: Soap Operas around the World*. Ed. Robert C. Allen. London: Routledge, 1995. 182–98.
- Strelitz, Larry Nathan. "Media Consumption and Identity Formation: The Case of the ‘Homeland’ Viewers." *Media, Culture & Society* 24 (2002): 459–80.
- White, Mimi. "Flows and Other Close Encounters with Television." *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*. Ed. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar. New York: New York UP, 2003. 94–110.
- Williams, Raymond. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. 1974. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan UP, 1992.
- Winnicott, D. W. *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock, 1971.

**C. Lee Harrington** is a professor of sociology and an affiliate of the Women’s Studies Program at Miami University. Her research interests are in the areas of television studies and the sociology of law. She has published other articles on television and its audiences in journals such as *Media, Culture & Society*, *Poetics*, *Feminist Media Studies*, and *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*.

**Denise D. Bielby** is professor of sociology and affiliated faculty, Center for Film, Television, and New Media at the University of California–Santa Barbara. Her research focuses on sociology of culture, mass media, and gender, and her work has appeared in *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Poetics*, *Journal of Popular Culture*, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, and *Television and New Media*.